DOCUMENTED BRIEFING

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Stability in South Asia

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PREFACE

The South Asian region is generally perceived to be a volatile area of the world. Its two principal states, India and Pakistan, have a record of mutual animosity dating back to their independence in 1947. They have fought three major wars since then, and they came close to war in 1987 and again in 1990.

India and Pakistan are currently engaged in a low-intensity conflict waged by proxy over the disputed state of Kashmir. Both countries have active nuclear weapons programs under way and both are energetically engaged in acquiring the means to deliver these weapons. Consequently, several observers in the United States and abroad, including successive Directors of Central Intelligence, have argued that the South Asian region represents the most probable international arena where deterrence breakdown might lead to nuclear use.

This briefing summarizes key findings of a RAND research project on stability in South Asia. It is divided into four sections. The first section, "Security Competition in South Asia," broadly describes the competitive nature of the Indo-Pakistani relationship. The second section, "Relative Military Capabilities and Constraints," summarizes the character of the military balance and argues that, for strict military reasons alone, premeditated conventional wars between India and Pakistan are unlikely in the foreseeable future. The third section, "National Strategies and Deterrence Instability," examines the transformation in grand strategy currently under way in India and Pakistan with a view to ascertaining how the changes there could affect deterrence stability over the long term. The fourth and final section, "Implications for the U.S. Army," relates the broad findings of the research effort to the interests of the study's sponsor: specifically, it identifies various indicators that Army intelligence analysts should focus on when assessing the prospects of future instability in South Asia. The analysis supporting the conclusions offered in this briefing will be published separately in forthcoming RAND reports.

All the data pertaining to the military balance and the deployment of forces have been drawn entirely from open sources, and no effort has been made to reconcile these data with information from classified holdings. This implies that the information appearing in this document is in many ways inaccurate, but it does not fundamentally compromise either the principal analytical conclusions (highlighted in this briefing) or the policy implications for the United States (which will be discussed at some length in forthcoming reports). The author and the study sponsors believe that, despite the limitations of open source information, an unclassified treatment of the issues pertaining to stability in South Asia is essential to stimulate wider debate in the United States and abroad.

The research reported in this document was sponsored by the U.S. Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Intelligence, and was conducted in the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND's Arroyo Center, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the United States Army. The findings should be of interest to regional military and intelligence analysts, the counter-proliferation community, and South Asian scholars in general.

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SUMMARY

The South Asian region is generally perceived to be a volatile area of the world. This perception derives primarily from the chronic instability that is seen to affect India and Pakistan—an instability rooted in both economic and political underdevelopment as well as in the enduring rivalry between the two states.

This instability has episodically surfaced in acute form: India and Pakistan have fought three major wars since their independence in 1947, and both states came close to war in 1987 and again in 1990. Both states are currently engaged in a low-intensity conflict waged by proxy over the disputed state of Kashmir. The two countries also have active nuclear weapons programs under way, and each state is energetically engaged in acquiring the means to deliver these weapons. Not surprisingly, therefore, South Asia is invariably viewed by many observers within the United States as an explosive "flashpoint" in global politics, and successive Directors of Central Intelligence have argued that the Indian subcontinent represents the most probable international arena where deterrence breakdown might lead to nuclear use.

This research effort seeks to understand the logic and prospect of deterrence breakdown in South Asia. It examines the nature of the security competition between India and Pakistan; the military capabilities of both states and the impact of such capabilities on decisions relating to war and peace; the national strategies of both countries and how those strategies contribute to the ongoing competition; and the key indicators that the intelligence community, and DCSINT analysts in particular, should focus on when tracking the problem of South Asian instability.

The major conclusions are as follows.

In contrast to the widespread belief that the South Asian region represents an arena where deterrence breakdown is either probable or likely, this research concludes that the Indian subcontinent is likely to enjoy an extended period of "ugly stability" that will probably last for at least a decade and possibly more. This peculiar form of stability derives substantially from the *inability* of both India and Pakistan to attain what may be desired political objectives through war. Consequently, premeditated conventional conflicts will remain absent for some time to come, though security competition will continue through sub-conventional violence waged with varying levels of intensity.

This conclusion—that premeditated conventional conflict is unlikely to arise in the foreseeable future—derives in the first instance from the fact that neither India nor Pakistan currently seems to be capable of successfully prosecuting any

premeditated conventional war of unlimited aims within the reasonably representative political constraints that would affect both combatants. Pakistan's military capabilities are simply too ineffectual to support the pursuit of an unlimited-aims war with India. Although India, by contrast, appears to possess formidable military capabilities, a more detailed analysis suggests that its combat power is insufficient to overwhelm Pakistan within the constraints of a short war. Since a long war threatens to be incredibly costly and could result in a painful campaign of attrition, India is unlikely to pursue one so long as it represents the only feasible avenue of pursuing objectives of unlimited aims.

Although both India and Pakistan have the military capabilities to pursue some kinds of limited-aims war, such conflicts are also unlikely in the foreseeable future. Fears about the success and effectiveness of military operations and concerns about horizontal and vertical escalation combine to prevent premeditated conflict at a time when neither India nor Pakistan can assure itself that war termination would occur on demand. Each side's inability to satisfy itself that a limited-aims war would in fact remain limited is the principal impediment to the initiation of such conflicts in the policy-relevant future.

These conclusions hold even when the effects of nuclear weapons are excluded from the analysis. When the latent nuclear capabilities of both sides are introduced into the equation, it becomes evident that these capabilities play *some* role in preventing each state from *directly* challenging the other at a time when neither side is capable of effectively neutralizing the opponent's deterrent. How much of a role they play is still an open question. This research concludes that the value of nuclear weapons in assuring deterrence stability in South Asia is much more ambiguous than is commonly believed and that, in a strict sense, the issue is *overdetermined*: the absence of major war since 1971 can adequately be explained by some combination of significant conventional military weakness, the lack of political incentives to alter the status quo, the prohibitive costs of conventional war in the context of conspicuous economic weaknesses on both sides, the lack of perceived great-power support for the revisionist agendas that one or the other state may have harbored, as well as the presence of latent nuclear capabilities.

In the final analysis, however, the conclusion that premeditated conventional wars are unlikely in the policy-relevant future is rooted not merely in narrow technical factors about military capability, including nuclear weapons, but in the broad—and ultimately determining—conditions of political choice. India's political objectives are crucial here, in large part because it is the stronger power and, as such, can pursue more aggressive strategic options in comparison to Pakistan. This research effort concludes that India today, and for the foreseeable future, is unlikely to see its political interests served by either the subjugation or the fractionation of Pakistan. The former option would confront India with the prospect of adding many tens of millions of new Muslims to its already large and

relatively poor Muslim population; the latter option would only result in unstable polities and greater discord close to India's border. Since neither of these two possibilities is assessed to be very palatable to New Delhi today, the political imperatives for war at the Indian end are, for all practical purposes, seen to be nonexistent. The lack of political incentives only reinforces the deterrence stability otherwise arising from military incapability on both sides.

Since conventional conflicts are judged to be implausible for a combination of both military and political reasons, this research concludes that *unconventional* conflicts—in the form of either state-supported terrorism or state-supported insurgency—will remain the principal form of security competition in South Asia in the immediate future. Such conflicts, which arise mainly as a result of domestic dissidence attracting covert support from the other side, will endure so long as: the conventional military forces on both sides remain relatively ineffective in the context of the demands imposed by short wars; the nuclear capabilities of both states remain immune to decapitation; the prospects of war widening are seen by both sides as remote; the domestic political environment in one and possibly both states is unsettling; and the kind of foreign intervention that could conclusively prevent any escalation of conflict is perceived to be uncertain. Since most of these conditions, especially the first, are expected to obtain for at least another decade (and possibly more), it is reasonable to conclude that South Asia will continue to enjoy conventional deterrence stability of the kind witnessed in the post-1971 period, even though this stability will be "ugly" in that it entails a relatively high degree of subconventional violence on at least one side, perhaps both.

It is in this context that the nuclear capabilities in South Asia display their most destabilizing potential. The existence of such capabilities has clearly enabled Pakistan to support insurgencies within India as a means of either settling outstanding political differences or wearing India down. Both these strategies exploit India's weaknesses as a state and operate on the premise that New Delhi cannot retaliate conventionally for fear of sparking a nuclear holocaust. Such strategies, however, have created incentives for India to play "tit-for-tat," thus leading to the fears often expressed in the United States that security competition in South Asia may one day spin out of control.

The prospects of such escalation in the foreseeable future, however, are assessed to be generally low. In large measure, this is due to India's strategic passivity and restraint. This response, owing partly to otiose decisionmaking and partly to calculation, is driven by New Delhi's desire to successfully complete the economic restructuring program begun in 1991 without the enervating distraction of high-intensity security competition. Consistent with this desire, Indian security managers have made a *deliberate* policy decision not to expand their counterinsurgency operations in Kashmir and elsewhere to include cross-

border operations of any kind, but instead to restrict the employment of security forces to reactive operations alone within Indian territory.

Because India has embarked on a concerted effort to look beyond the constraining environs of South Asia in order to pursue the larger great-power capabilities that eluded it throughout the Cold War, the stage could be set for a consequential power transition within South Asia. This transition will certainly occur if India continues to chalk up the impressive growth rates it has achieved in recent years and if Pakistan, seized by the chimera of recovering Kashmir, continues to neglect the serious domestic challenges that could ultimately threaten its stability from within. If such a power transition were to occur, thanks to the uneven growth in state capacity in India and Pakistan, India could become the third pole—along with China and Japan—in future Asian geopolitics, and the Indo-Pakistani competition would thereafter be reduced merely to sideshow status.

This development—which many analysts today believe is likely—could beget some unpalatable possibilities over the secular future. For example, if India's present bid for great-power status appears to succeed, it could unnerve Pakistan and cause it to initiate a military action—as it did in 1965—to secure outstanding territorial claims before it is too late. Alternatively, conventional war could arise simply as a response to political decay and state breakdown in Pakistan in a manner reminiscent of 1971. Finally—although this is extremely implausible—India could embark on a hegemonic war to "solve the Pakistan problem" permanently. If, however, India's bid for great-power status should sputter, conventional conflict could occur if New Delhi chooses to initiate a punitive war in response to continued Pakistani needling.

It must be emphasized that all these outcomes involving deterrence breakdown in the future are relatively low-probability events. Assuming present trends continue, none is assessed to be very likely. These contingencies have been identified, nonetheless, because each of them embodies potentially high costs for the South Asian countries themselves and, secondarily, for the United States. Each embodies potentially large-scale violence and possibly nuclear brandishing and, in the limiting case, even nuclear use—in other words, just the kinds of outcomes that would engage U.S. strategic interests in the region most directly. For this reason, the contributing factors that could precipitate each of these contingencies have been identified in detail in the annotation in the third section of this briefing, and they are summarized in graphic form in the appendix. They merit close and continual scrutiny by intelligence analysts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the advice and support of several individuals who especially contributed to the success of this project. Colonel William Speer, Chief, Foreign Military Intelligence, ODCSINT, U.S. Army, not only funded the project generously but actively encouraged the research effort and provided numerous opportunities to disseminate its findings by both formal and informal means throughout the intelligence and policy communities. Captain James Oxley, USA, and later Eric Vardac, both at ODCSINT, collaborated throughout the research effort by providing information and access to several knowledgeable individuals within the government.

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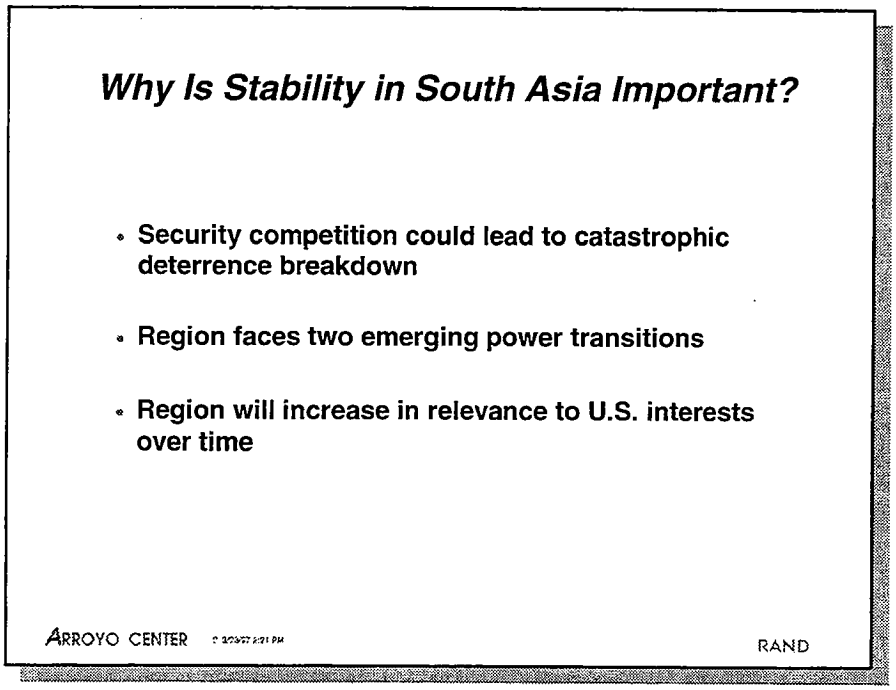
Both Sandy Dougharty and Barbara Wagner provided splendid secretarial support, and Nikki Shacklett skillfully translated the text into readable prose.

Finally, this documented briefing profited immensely from two very thoughtful and accomplished reviewers: Walter Andersen, Chief, South Asia Division, Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department, and Leo E. Rose, Editor, *Asian Survey*.

Needless to say, the opinions expressed here are not necessarily shared by any of the individuals or institutions named above.

Stability in South Asia

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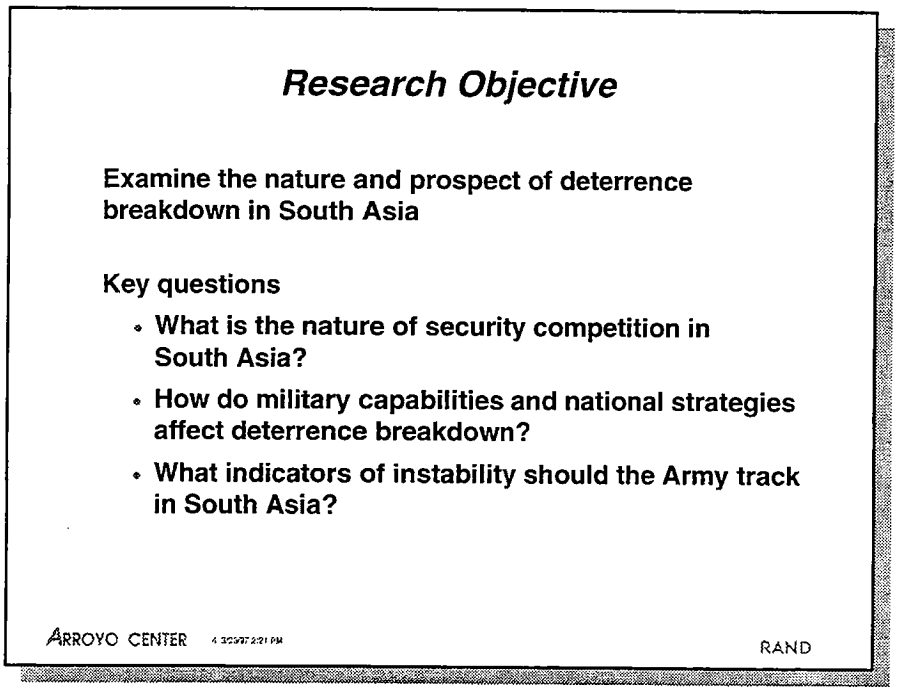
South Asia is perhaps the only region in the world where active and ongoing armed conflicts occur under the shadow of nuclear weaponry. Consequently, it is widely recognized that deterrence breakdown between India and Pakistan represents a possibility fraught with serious consequences, some of which include nuclear weapons use. Such nuclear use—were it to occur—would have serious repercussions for international politics in general and for the Asian region in particular.

- First, it would exacerbate Sino-Indian competition, which, despite the current detente, is poised for serious rivalry as both states strive for great-power status. It could also result in deepened Chinese support for Pakistan, possibly involving further transfers of nuclear technology and advanced delivery systems.
- Second, it would weaken American efforts to reduce the salience of nuclear weaponry worldwide. Nuclear use in South Asia could either encourage other states to seriously pursue nuclear weapons programs or produce great revulsion against such weapons. *Successful* nuclear use, however, would certainly exacerbate proliferation pressures. It would provide an object lesson for aspiring nuclear states and increase the spread of weapons that threaten U.S. interests on a large scale.
- Third, nuclear use in South Asia would most likely involve countervalue targets because both Indian and Pakistani arsenals are small and are judged to contain relatively primitive weapons. Any use of these weapons on the large, heavily populated cities of the subcontinent would generate a need for demanding humanitarian operations, possibly involving U.S. military forces.

Besides the obvious problem of potential nuclear use, the issue of regional stability is also important because of the two power transitions now occurring in the "Greater" South Asian region. For the first time since independence, it appears as if India seems poised to secure true great-power capabilities, thereby promising to make Pakistan irrelevant as a long-term competitor. Even as this process unfolds, however, a rising India faces an even more successful China to the north, thereby guaranteeing that Sino-Indian rivalry will become the dominant feature of future South Asian geopolitics, with Indo-Pakistani competition relegated to sideshow status.

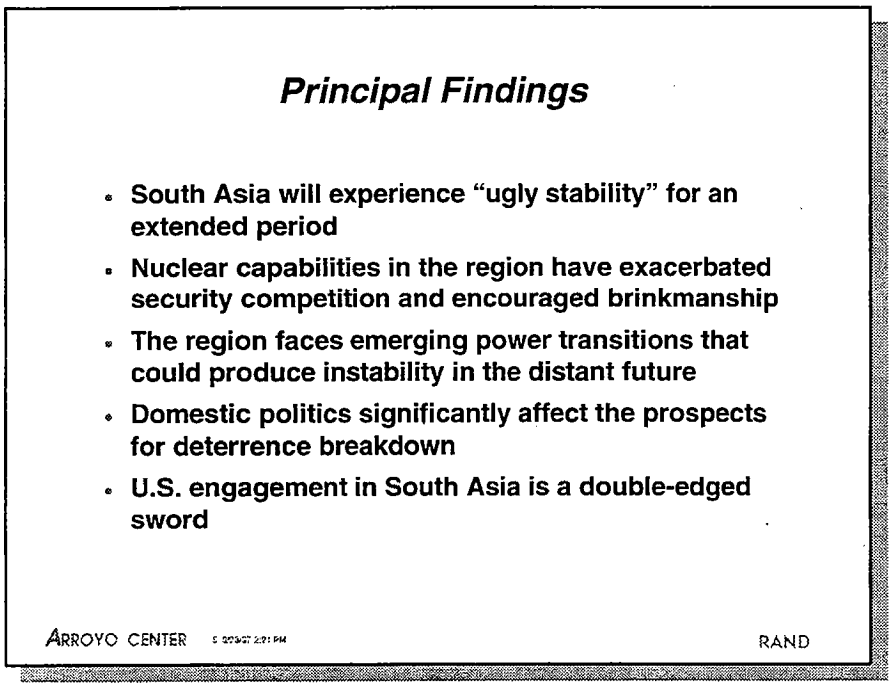
The salient trend worth noting, therefore, is that there are potentially critical power transitions under way in and around South Asia. These transitions will probably bequeath India local hegemony and thereby increase the intensity of Sino-Indian competition down the line. Like all power transitions before them, they could be accompanied by potentially serious instability involving all *three* states. Although the Sino-Indian interaction has not been the principal focus of this research effort, it is useful to recognize its existence even if only as a backdrop to the Indo-Pakistani security competition that is usually the most familiar feature of local politics in South Asia.

Finally, South Asia as a region will become more valuable to the United States over time. The United States will continue to increase its economic stake in both India and Pakistan as they pursue programs of economic reform and technical modernization. The United States will presumably reach out to India as part of a larger effort at "shaping and hedging," especially in the context of developing strategic understanding with various Asian states about a rising China. And the United States will seek to engage both India and Pakistan with respect to security issues in west and central Asia, the northern Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia. As India's economic achievements become more palpable, that country will probably assume greater importance in U.S. policy toward Asia at large. Thus, India in particular and South Asia in general merit serious and continued attention for their potentially positive contributions to U.S. interests.



The principal objective of this research effort has been to understand the logic and prospect of deterrence breakdown in South Asia. Since India and Pakistan are not overt or mature nuclear powers, deterrence breakdown is unlikely to occur in the form of "bolt-out-of-the-blue" nuclear attacks. Rather, it will manifest itself first in the form of conventional force employment and thereafter through nuclear weapons, which could be employed in either a complementary or a reactive role. Accordingly, this project has examined the mechanics of conventional deterrence and the role of nuclear weapons in that context.

In this connection, the project has focused on understanding the nature of the security competition in South Asia, the military capabilities and the national strategies of India and Pakistan and how those variables contribute to the ongoing competition, and the key indicators that the intelligence community and DCSINT analysts should focus on when tracking instability in the region.



This research effort has yielded five principal conclusions.

First, in contrast to the widespread belief that the South Asian region represents an arena where deterrence breakdown is either probable or likely, this research concludes that the Indian subcontinent is likely to enjoy an extended period of "ugly stability" that will probably last for at least a decade and possibly longer. This peculiar form of stability derives substantially from the *inability* of both India and Pakistan to attain what may be desired political objectives through war. Consequently, premeditated conventional conflicts of both unlimited and limited aims will remain absent for some time to come, though security competition will continue through subconventional violence waged with varying levels of intensity.

Second, the destabilizing aspects of nuclear capabilities in South Asia have been manifested more clearly than their stabilizing potential. Nuclear weapons have enabled Pakistan to support insurgencies within India as a means of settling outstanding political differences or with the intention of wearing India down. Both these strategies exploit India's weaknesses as a state, and they are premised on the expectation that New Delhi cannot retaliate conventionally for fear of sparking a nuclear holocaust. However, these strategies have created incentives for India to play "tit-for-tat," thus leading to the fears often expressed in the United States that political competition may one day spin out of control. To date, however, India has adopted a muted counterresponse in order to focus on completing its economic restructuring program begun earlier in the decade.

Third, thanks to a comprehensive reform program, India appears poised to acquire the larger great-power capabilities that eluded it throughout the Cold War. Because Pakistan, in contrast, remains seized by the chimera of recovering Kashmir to the

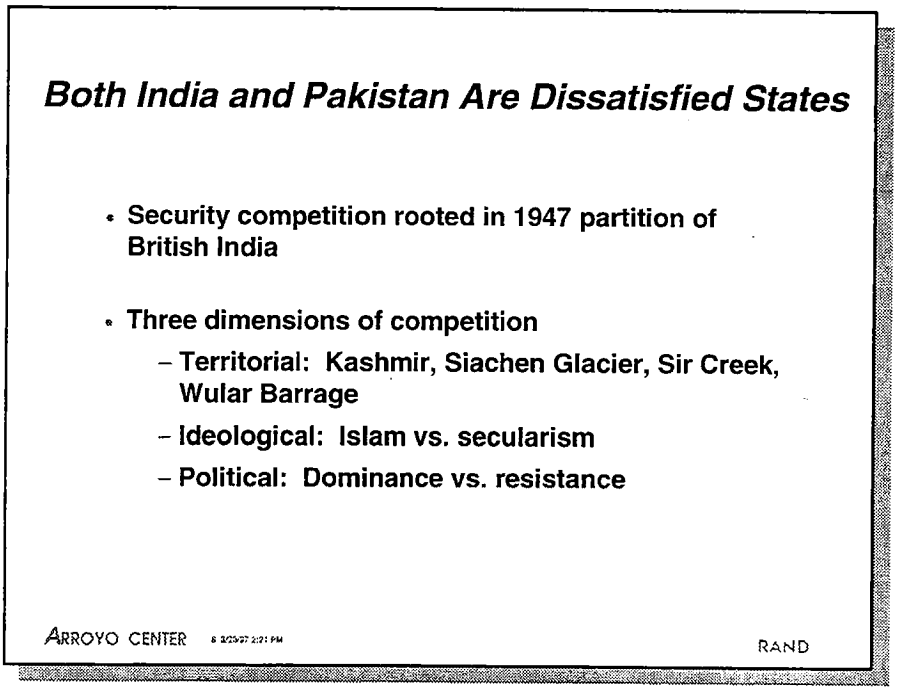
neglect of serious domestic challenges that could ultimately threaten its stability from within, the stage could be set for a consequential power transition within South Asia. This transition implies that Pakistan, becoming increasingly irrelevant as India's long-term competitor, will be replaced by a successful China to the north, thereby guaranteeing that Sino-Indian rivalry will become the dominant feature of future South Asian geopolitics. These transitions could beget some kinds of deterrence instability over the long term that—even though they appear remote today—merit close and continual scrutiny by the United States.

Fourth, domestic political developments are critical for understanding the prospects for deterrence breakdown. Both India and Pakistan, in different ways, have weak political regimes. The prospects for their survival, the character of the opposition movements in both states, and the infirmities of existing state institutions all combine to make domestic politics critical to decisions about war and peace. For that reason, India and Pakistan cannot be treated as "black boxes" where security competition is concerned. Analysts must focus on the internal health of each polity as well as on grand strategy when trying to anticipate deterrence breakdown in South Asia.

Finally, although the United States remains a critical actor in South Asia, its presence is a double-edged sword. The United States contributes to *stability* insofar as it can influence the forms of security competition, the shape and evolution of Indian and Pakistani nuclear architectures, and the general patterns of political interaction. It contributes to *instability* if either Pakistan or India comes to view American interest in the region as an opportunity to settle old scores on the premise either that U.S. assistance would be forthcoming in a crisis or that, for larger geopolitical reasons, the United States would choose not to penalize the initiator of conflict.

Outline

- **Security competition in South Asia**
- **Relative military capabilities and constraints**
- **National strategies and deterrence instability**
- **Implications for the U.S. Army**



Security competition in South Asia dates back to the dissolution of the British *Raj* in 1947, which resulted in the birth of two successor states, India and Pakistan. The partitioning of British India was a traumatic event that involved an artificial division of territory, the uprooting of about ten million individuals, and the death of perhaps a quarter of a million people in violence that accompanied the greatest mass migration in modern history. What was perhaps most problematic about this event, finally, was the fact that neither of the two states appeared to be satisfied with its outcome. India viewed Partition as *unnecessary and tragic, but essentially complete.* Pakistan viewed Partition as *inevitable and necessary, but fundamentally incomplete* because Kashmir, a Muslim majority state, remained with India. The loss of Kashmir was highly significant because it was the last component necessary to complete the vision Pakistan's founders had of a cohesive republic composed of all the adjoining northwestern Muslim majority areas of erstwhile British India.

Given this history, the competition between India and Pakistan is multi-dimensional. First there is a contest over territory. Besides Kashmir, there are unresolved territorial disputes over the Siachen Glacier, where India and Pakistan continue to fight an active, high-altitude war, and over Sir Creek in the Rann of Kutch, where in 1964 both states fought a limited action that included the use of armor. The Wular Barrage constitutes a dispute over water rights pertaining to one of the tributaries of the Indus. Although only Kashmir contains the potential for full-scale conventional war, the others have contributed to discordant "atmospherics" and occasional political crises in the past.

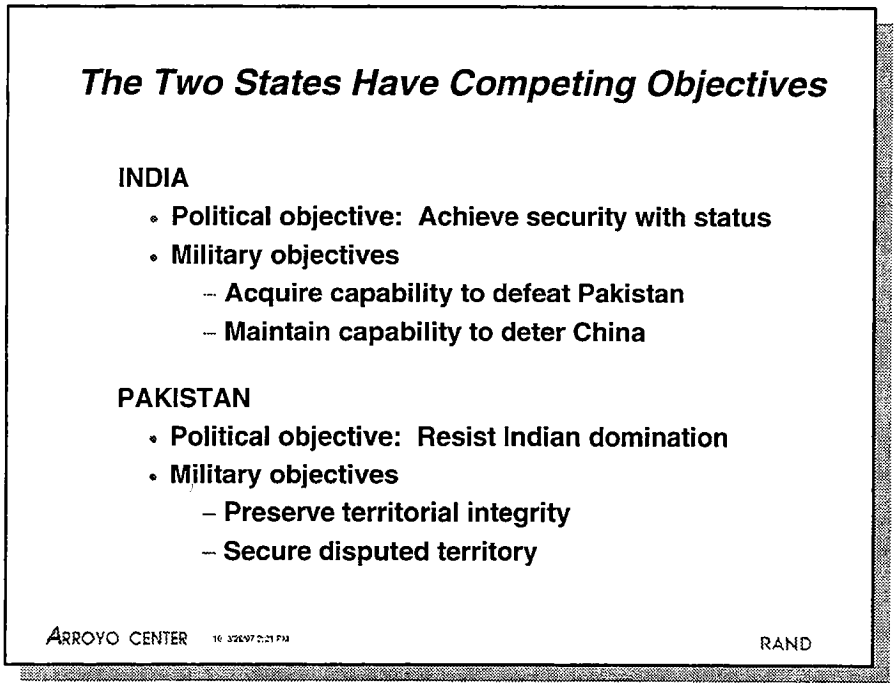
Territorial competition is supplemented by competing political visions and contested identities. India draws its inspiration from the ideal of liberal democracy,

which includes secularism, even as it struggles to accommodate new revisionist parties that espouse more self-conscious forms of Hindu nationalism. In contrast, Pakistan not only disparages Indian secularism as a myth obscuring the reality of Hindu domination, but also holds out a yet-to-be defined Islam as its preferred ideal over nonreligious secularism. Pakistan's vision of itself as the guardian state for South Asia's Muslims, however, is challenged by a disconcerting empirical fact: India's Muslim population is almost as large as, if not already larger than, Pakistan's entire population, thus making India, not Pakistan, the larger "Muslim" state.

Finally, Indo-Pakistani competition is defined by the twin motifs of dominance and resistance. In Indian conceptions, true security can derive only from an unchallenged recognition of its standing as an important state about to actualize its vast potential after several centuries of division and subjugation. India is heir to both an ancient civilization and the erstwhile *Raj*. It possesses a large population and an extensive landmass. It has great economic, technological, and military potential. Thus for India, *survival* means survival as a great power and *security* has come to describe the safety that enables India to develop, maintain, and prosper in its political eminence.

This vision of security is by no means directed primarily at intimidating Pakistan. Rather, it draws upon India's perceptions of itself, its history, its view of the world, and the role it seeks in the global arena. But because international politics is ultimately about relative gains, the Indian desire for eminence—though rooted in autonomous justifications completely apart from Pakistan—engenders unintended consequences where Islamabad is concerned. From Islamabad's point of view, the eminence that guarantees India permanent security is highly menacing and could represent the end of Pakistan as an autonomous political entity. Consequently, it is naturally inclined to resist Indian political dominance, by diplomacy when possible but by force if necessary. The stage is thus set for continued rivalry between the two states.

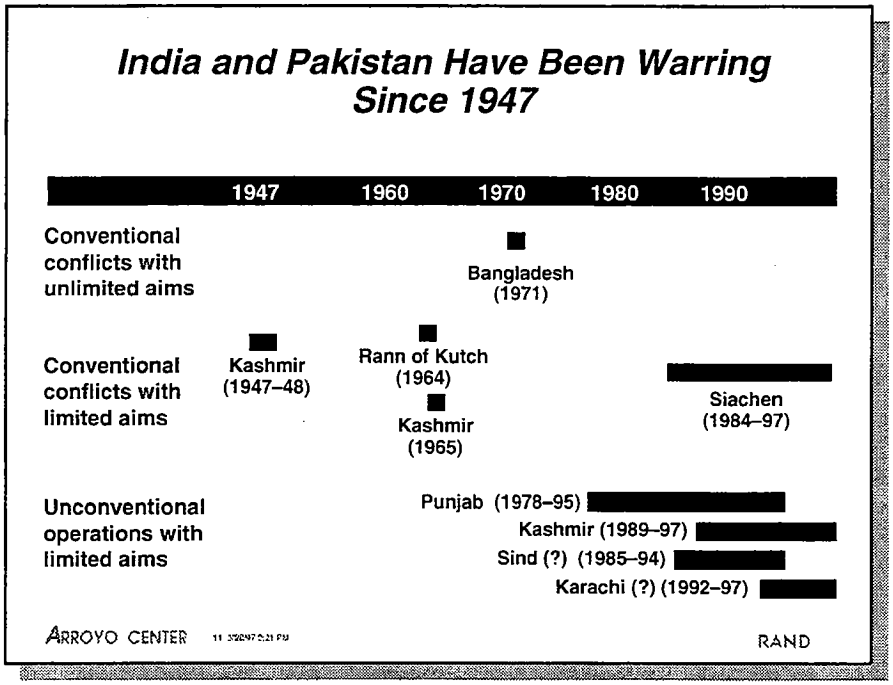
India and Pakistan therefore are both dissatisfied states, but the nature of their dissatisfactions varies. Indian dissatisfactions today are mainly psychological, deriving from the unwillingness of Pakistan and the great powers at large to accord it hegemonic status. Pakistani dissatisfactions are more structural in nature and include territorial claims, ideological dispositions, and deep-rooted fears about possible loss of autonomy. Political and strategic circumstances thus have cast Pakistan as the anti-status-quo state in the Indian subcontinent. As such, it has *relatively* greater incentives to alter the prevailing equilibrium by force—a condition that will persist until the outstanding issue of Kashmir is resolved to the satisfaction of Islamabad.



The competitive nature of South Asian politics is reflected in the divergent objectives pursued by India and Pakistan. India's principal political goal is security with status. Its derivative military objectives include acquiring the capability to decisively defeat Pakistan while maintaining the requisite military capabilities to adequately deter China.

Pakistan's principal political objective consists mainly of resisting India's natural dominance in order to preserve both its physical security and its decisional autonomy. Its derivative military objectives include defending its territorial integrity vis-à-vis India—an issue of great importance given Pakistan's experience in 1971—and securing the outstanding disputed territories, which mainly center on wresting Kashmir from Indian "occupation."

The competitive nature of these objectives ordinarily implies the existence of a security dilemma in which each state, arming itself for purely defensive reasons, inadvertently threatens the security of the other. In the Indo-Pakistani case, however, the security dilemma becomes even more vicious and intractable because the relative *superiority* India needs to counter the two-front threats it faces becomes unacceptable to Pakistan, given Islamabad's inability to trust New Delhi's intentions. Indian attempts at maintaining such superiority only reinforce the Pakistani perception of India as being willfully determined to "undo" the historic partition of the subcontinent and, by implication, to terminate the existence of Pakistan itself as an independent political entity.



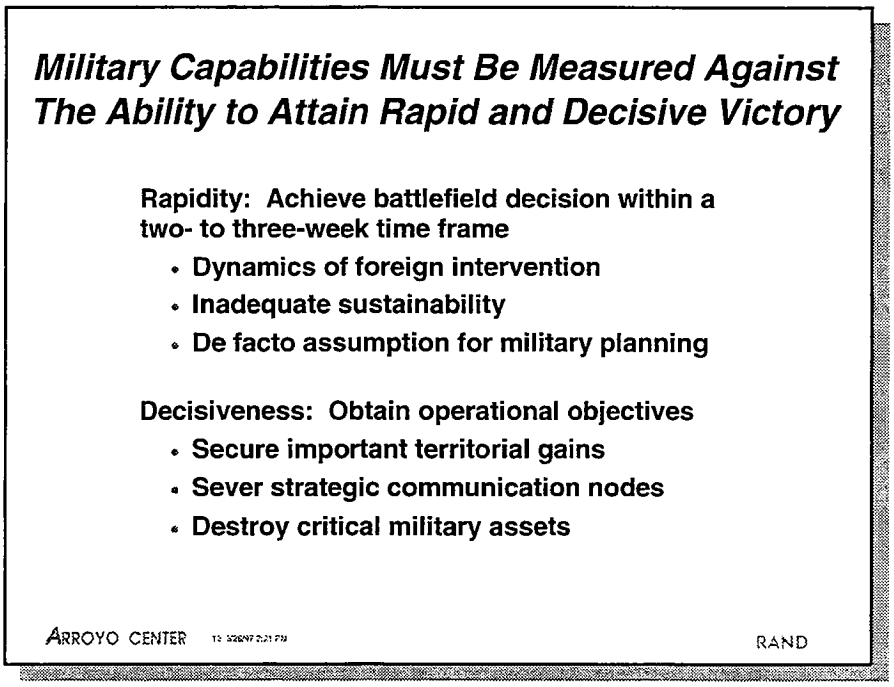
Because of the intractable nature of Indo-Pakistani competition, relations between the two states can be described, albeit hyperbolically, as "one long war" waged almost continuously since independence. The Indian subcontinent has witnessed a conventional conflict with unlimited aims (designed to destroy, or having the effect of destroying, the opposing state) in 1971 when India, in response to the Pakistani civil war, intervened to create the new state of Bangladesh.

The Indian subcontinent has also witnessed conventional conflict of limited aims (designed to secure objectives short of destroying the opposing state) at several times since 1947. India and Pakistan fought limited wars over Kashmir in 1947–48; in the Rann of Kutch in 1964; in Kashmir and Punjab in 1965; and over the Siachen Glacier almost uninterruptedly from 1984 to the present time.

Finally, more or less coinciding with the weakening of conventional capabilities and the nuclearization of the subcontinent, there has been an increasing proclivity to pursue unconventional operations of limited aims. Pakistan supported the Sikh insurgency in India during the 1980s and shifted its support toward the Kashmiri insurgency from the late 1980s to the present day. India is suspected of having supported past resistance in Sind and is sometimes accused of supporting the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM) in Karachi, while Pakistan is accused of supporting minor unrest in various parts of India.

Outline

- Security competition in South Asia
- Relative military capabilities and constraints
- National strategies and deterrence instability
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There are many available measures of military power, but perhaps the best measure of military capabilities in the South Asian context is the ability of a state to achieve rapid and decisive victory in war. This criterion focuses on outputs (as opposed merely to input measures such as force levels and transformation measures like weapons effectiveness indices) and allows for the incorporation of factors like military strategy and political constraints.

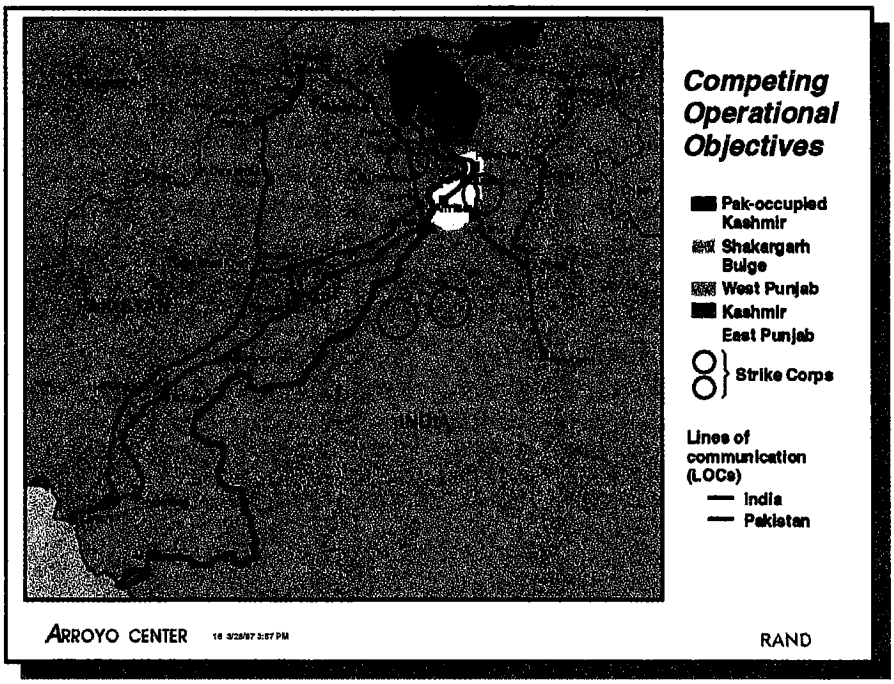
In the South Asian context, the notions of *rapid* and *decisive* victory have specific operational predicates.

Rapid victory involves being able to achieve a clear battlefield decision within about two to three weeks—the time both states presume the international community would take to intervene and force a halt in hostilities. This criterion is based on the presumption that the international community would seek to prevent any change in the status quo in South Asia *through war*. This presumption is corroborated by the fact that all previous subcontinental conflicts (with the exception of 1947–48) were terminated under international pressure within a two- to three-week period. With the latent nuclear capabilities now present in South Asia, the presumption that international pressure would be brought to bear on both combatants within a few weeks of the start of war only becomes more salient.

Consistent with these considerations, neither India nor Pakistan has developed the logistical capability to sustain high-intensity combat with modern weapons for much beyond this period. Of course, India does much better than Pakistan in this regard, given its stronger economic and technological capabilities. It has consumable stocks for much longer wars, but such holdings are, on balance, relatively uneven. Where critical munitions are concerned (for example, various

classes of guided weapons, most of which have to be imported), both states would effectively exhaust their inventories by the end of this notional two- to three-week time frame. It is also not clear whether both sides have the maintenance and repair capabilities required to sustain their desired force levels in the context of a high-wastage war extending beyond two to three weeks.

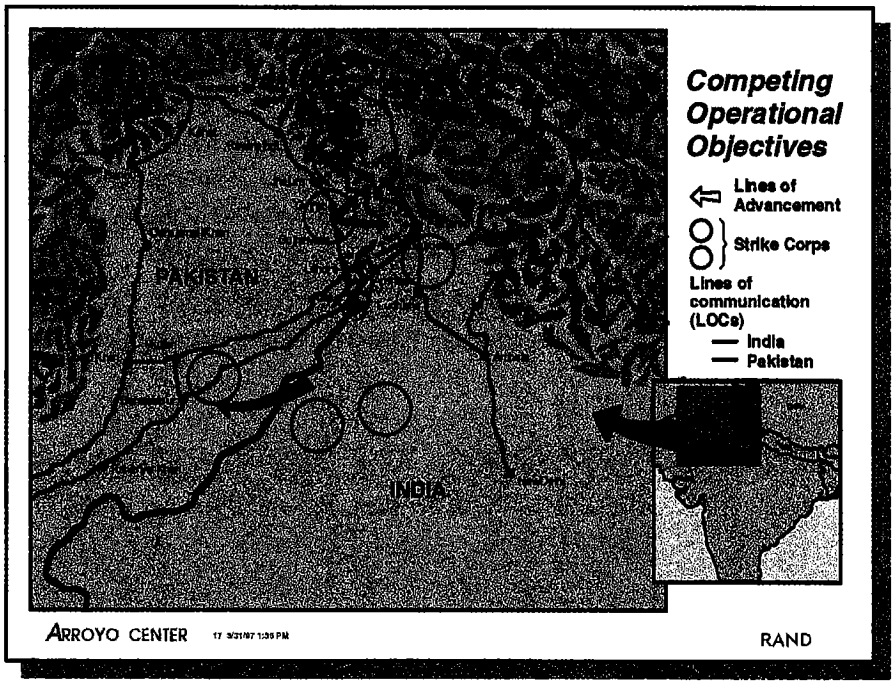
Combat beyond the two- to three-week period would, at any rate, be extremely costly for both sides (both in terms of immediate wastage and eventual replacement) and could degenerate into a slow and painful war of attrition. Because such an open-ended attrition campaign would be certainly costly and possibly paralyzing, it is unlikely to be favored by India; and since such a campaign would ultimately redound to India's natural advantages, it is unlikely to be favored by Pakistan. Therefore—though for different reasons—the circa two- to three-week window of opportunity has become the virtual military planning assumption for both sides.



In general, decisive victory in South Asia requires that one or more of three demanding operational objectives be attained. (See page 73 of the appendix for a rendition in larger scale.)

- **Making important territorial gains.** For India, this includes securing important parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, especially those portions adjacent to the vulnerable Indian axis Baramula-Punch and the town of Kargil; the Chicken's Neck–Shakargarh Bulge area that lies adjacent to both the important Indian town of Aknur and the critical Gurdaspur-Srinagar corridor, the latter connecting the defense network in Kashmir to the rest of India; and the critical areas of West Punjab in which the city of Lahore—the heart of the Pakistani ethos—is located. For Pakistan, important territorial gains include capturing the Vale of Kashmir, the most important area of the disputed state, as well as critical portions of East Punjab in which important Indian towns like Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Pathankot, and Ludhiana are located.
- **Severing strategic communications nodes.** For India, these objectives imply severing Pakistan's north-south lines of communication at any point between the northern cities of Rawalpindi, Gujrat, Lahore, and Kasur and the southern city of Karachi. For Pakistan, it implies attempting to cut the principal Indian lines of reinforcement to Kashmir, which run from Amritsar and Ludhiana through Pathankot and Jammu to Srinagar.
- **Destroying critical military assets.** In principle, this implies a vast target set that includes electric power systems, petroleum, oil and lubricant (POL) facilities and storage sites, communications networks, and the transportation system, as well as more specifically military targets like air bases, marshaling

yards, and staging areas. In a short war, "permanently" suppressing such strategic targets is extremely costly and may be relatively unproductive. The *minimal* strategic assets that count toward this objective, therefore, would be more operational—warfighting—assets, and these would include combat power of the kind embodied in armored and mechanized divisions, elite and specialized air squadrons, and perhaps some major surface and subsurface combatants. Consequently, for India, destroying critical military assets as a criterion of victory involves at a minimum engaging and destroying either or both of Pakistan's strike corps and its headquarters and army reserves. For Pakistan, it correspondingly involves engaging and destroying one or more of India's three strike corps and its headquarters and army reserves.



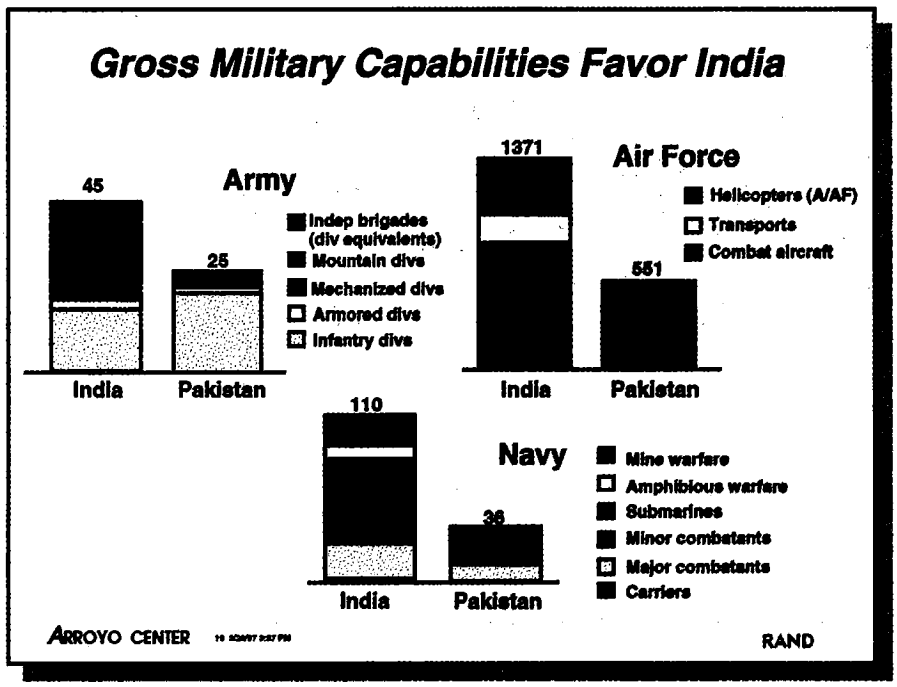
For both sides, the specific combination of objectives chosen would depend on the political aims sought to be procured through war. In any conflict of unlimited aims, destroying critical military assets would be less important as an end in itself. Rather, each side would attempt to secure important territory or cut off critical lines of communication (LOC), seeking to destroy military assets merely as a means to those ends. In any conflict of limited aims, securing territory *and* destroying military assets could both become important, though the exact degree of relative emphasis is impossible to forecast. In any event, a future Indo-Pakistani conflict would in all likelihood conform to the following pattern, if published Indian and Pakistani views on the subject are any indication. (See page 74 of the appendix for a rendition in larger scale.)

India will seek to cut off the Pakistani LOC in the vicinity of Bhawalpur and, if possible, advance along the Bhawalpur-Multan axis to irrevocably split the Pakistan state in half, thus assuring decisive victory. This strategy, codified by the Indian Army's *Plan 2000,* is designed to exploit the relatively open spaces of the southern Pakistani Punjab, since the northern areas of the region have heavy fixed positional defenses that exploit the area's dense irrigation networks. Simultaneously, India will likely engage in an offensive-defense in Kashmir and the northern Punjab to pin down Pakistani forces in areas of great strategic and symbolic importance to Islamabad, simultaneously reducing the level of resistance facing the two Indian strike corps in the south.

Being a weaker state, Pakistan cannot expect to engage in a comparable strategy of splitting India in half. Accordingly, it will attempt to preserve the territorial integrity of the Punjab, which is the most important component of the Pakistani state, while also attempting to make whatever gains it can in the disputed state

of Kashmir. Toward that end, Pakistan will seek to contain the Indian offensive aimed at Bhawalpur and its environs through a blocking action involving its Southern Strike Corps, using its Northern Strike Corps to cut the relatively vulnerable Indian LOC to Kashmir along the Aknur-Pathankot axis. Secondary actions will include threatening other Indian territories in the Punjab as well as mounting local offensives along the cease-fire line in Kashmir.

Once again, to achieve decisive victory in a subcontinental war, these objectives have to be attained within approximately a two- to three-week period.

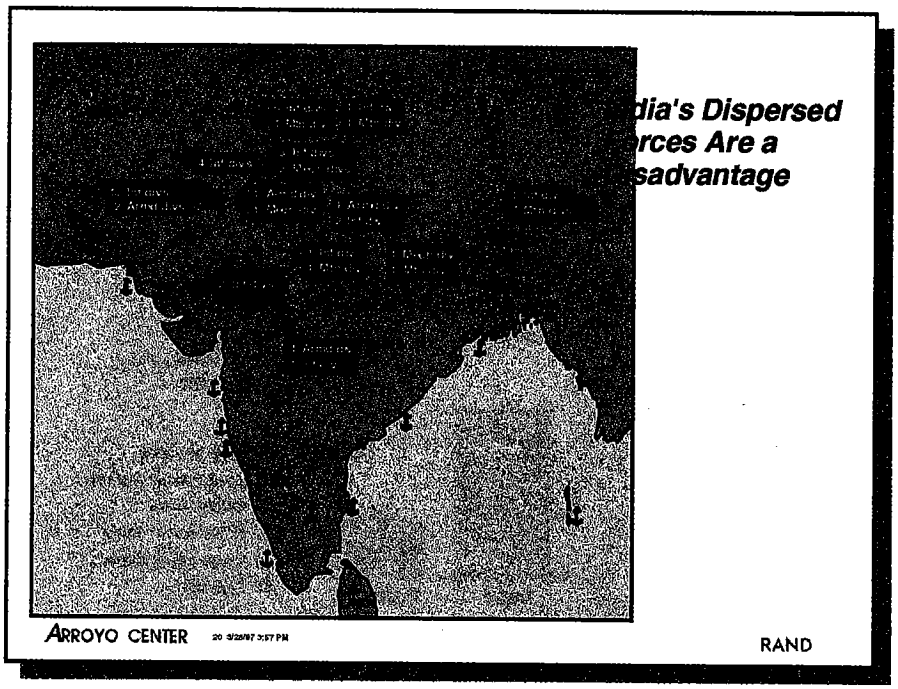


Clearly, the gross subcontinental balances favor India. The information shown here is collated principally from *The Military Balance, 1995–96* (London: IISS, 1996).

The numbers suggest that the Indian army is over 1.5 times the size of the Pakistani army, when measured by division strength. A similar ratio obtains when the size of the two armies is compared in terms of brigade strength, using other open-source information.

The Indian air force's combat strength is almost double that of the Pakistan air force, though open-source Indian reporting suggests that the IISS data from which these numbers are drawn tend to exaggerate India's air power strength.

The Indian navy is more than twice the size of the Pakistan navy, though thanks to budgetary problems a significant portion of its current order of battle is reported by the IISS to be nonoperational.

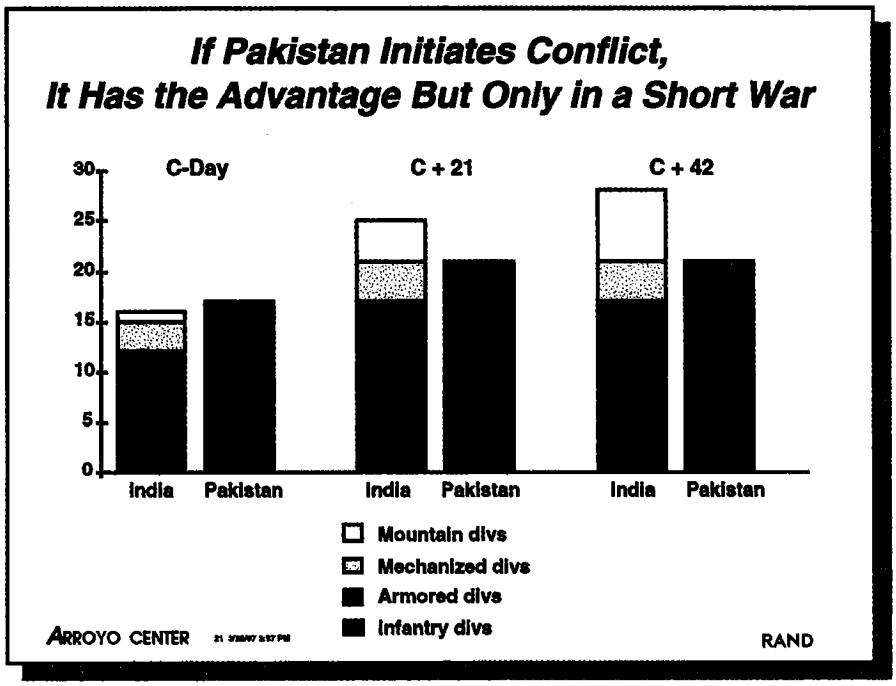


First impressions, however, are deceiving, because India's dispersed forces are at a significant disadvantage. The data in this chart are produced by reconciling unclassified information about the deployment patterns of the Indian army appearing in *The Military Balance, 1995–96* with the more detailed, though now dated, information appearing in Ravi Rikhye, *The War That Never Was* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1988).

In general, these and other open sources suggest that the Indian army's overall numerical advantages are usually vitiated because the service's combat power is dispersed at some distances throughout the country. Although several maneuver units, especially the armored regiments, are located much closer to the border than the principal sources used for this graphic suggest, the fact remains that they are separated from their parent formations and their wartime commands on a day-to-day basis.

Key elements of the strike corps, for example, which are built around India's armored divisions, are garrisoned at great distances from the border: some are in the west facing Pakistan, some are in central India, and some are even further away in southern India. Other divisions are similarly spread out in the north and east, many of which are primarily designated for contingencies involving China. Such dispersal essentially implies that India's vast combat strength is not readily available at short notice, first because of the distances between the peacetime garrisons, and second because of the varying levels of readiness at which different formations are maintained.

The Indian air force is likewise spread out at over forty air bases throughout the country, and the Indian navy is based along two coasts in several port facilities all along the peninsula.



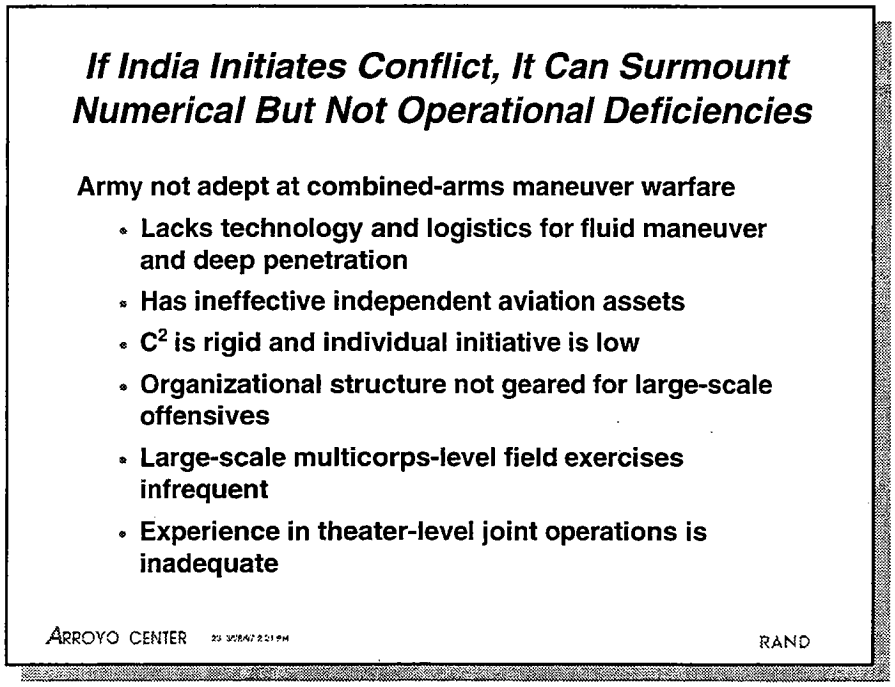
Pakistan, therefore, has significant advantages, but only if it achieves strategic surprise *and* is assured of war termination (by foreign intervention or otherwise) at the end of the notional two- to three-week period.

If it can achieve strategic surprise (as it did in 1965), it can muster as many army divisions as India routinely deploys along the Indo-Pakistani border and perhaps even slightly more. This correlation of forces, however, changes over time as India redeploys rear-garrisoned forces from its Central and Southern Commands to join those elements already committed on C(D)-Day. However, this redeployment can take anywhere from two to six weeks to complete, thus pushing India beyond the two- to three-week window necessary to achieve decisive victory. Once India further reassigns forces from its Eastern Command (normally deployed opposite China), its force strength grows even greater, but assuming that this process proceeds sequentially, it can take over six weeks to complete.

Depending on the assumptions made about the local security environment and the sequencing of Indian military redeployments, these time frames can vary, but the baseline conclusion still remains the same: *Indian advantages in numbers are minimized if Pakistan achieves strategic surprise and the conflict does not last much beyond a few weeks.*

Pakistan's strategic calculations, therefore, require foreign intervention for military success. Such intervention is necessary primarily to ensure that the conflict can be conclusively terminated before Indian military redeployments can change the correlation of forces on the battlefield. If such intervention cannot be presumed and, by implication, the hypothesized conflict cannot be terminated prior to C(D)+21 or thereabouts, the risks of a severe Pakistani defeat increase sharply—thereby making a decision to initiate war under such circumstances highly irrational. Precisely

because foreign intervention in a South Asian conflict cannot be presumed today (in the post–Cold War era when Islamabad's relative importance has diminished), Pakistan is unlikely to initiate any major conventional war in the foreseeable future.



If the premises of strategic surprise and foreign intervention are discounted, however, and if India is presumed to either initiate conflict or be forewarned of it, India's numerical disadvantages readily disappear. Given adequate time and preparation, India *can* muster the relevant superiority in numbers. If all except the minimal reserves designated for internal security and against China are committed, Indian forces could approach 28 divisions plus additional independent brigades against Pakistan's 21 divisions plus far fewer additional independent brigades. Even then, however, India would be unlikely to achieve decisive victory—understood as the conclusive degradation of Pakistan's warfighting potential in the context of either significant territorial acquisitions or any consequential interdiction of its strategic LOCs—within the notional two- to three-week period.

Such a victory against Pakistan *could* be obtained, but in the most representative military circumstances imaginable it would take months, not weeks, to materialize. In other words, the Indian army, despite its numerical and technological superiority, would be hard pressed to replicate the achievements of, say, Gerd von Runstedt's Army Group A during the first phase of the battle for France in 1940, let alone mimic the achievements of Norman Schwarzkopf and the Allied coalition in Operation Desert Storm. This is the principal *military* reason why India is unlikely to initiate any major conventional war in the foreseeable future, though it must be admitted up front that political, rather than military, reasons undergird India's disinterest in pursuing significant combat operations against Pakistan.

This paradoxical outcome of being unable to secure rapid and decisive victory even given numerical and technological superiority derives principally from India's inability to efficiently prosecute large-scale maneuver wars that *require complex and coordinated combined-arms operations.* The 1965 and 1971 conflicts suggest that India

is capable of successfully prosecuting attrition-style and even maneuver campaigns involving single or at most a few combat arms. But integrating all arms—infantry, armor, artillery, engineers, signals, reconnaissance, EW capabilities, and logistics elements—into a coherent force capable of high-speed, fluid operations currently remains beyond India's reach. So it is unlikely that India's superior numbers will be able to overwhelm or bypass the carefully prepared Pakistani defenses in the Punjab or to make the deep inroads necessary along the Bhawalpur axis in Pakistan's southern Punjab within the two- to three-week time frame required for victory.

At the operational level, the Indian army's limitations are manifested in several ways. For example, the Indian army lacks an effective capability for deep fires; it does not have sufficient numbers of reliable self-propelled guns and rocket artillery. Its logistics support network is also inadequate for a war of rapid movement. While the army could support the deliberate, preplanned phases of an offensive at short distances from its baseline positions, it could not sustain the more opportunistic and deep thrusts it envisages in future wars, operations that heavily deplete U.S. Class III, IV, and V consumables and make weighty demands on maintenance and repair capabilities.

The army also lacks the kind of independent aviation assets that would make a difference on the battlefield. It struggled for years to establish an aviation corps against vociferous air force opposition. When it finally succeeded, the army's aviation corps was restricted primarily to observation, utility, and light attack helicopters. The principal heliborne attack assets, consisting of 32 Mi-25/35 helicopters, are still maintained by the air force and in any case are not the best systems for the anti-armor/fire support role. The army still continues its search for dedicated anti-tank helicopters like the Russian Mi-28 *Havoc* and the Italian A-139 *Mangusta.*

Exacerbating these technological and logistical problems is the Indian army's mindset and institutional culture. Having descended from what was originally intended to be an imperial police force, the Indian army has traditionally displayed classic British conservatism in its approach to war. The emphasis on detailed control as opposed to directive control might have been effective if combined with a German penchant for risk-taking or a Soviet penchant for speed. In the Indian case, however, detailed control has stifled initiative within the maneuver elements. It has also made achieving rapid victory all but impossible because of an excessive emphasis on deliberate and planned attacks that focus on attriting the enemy's strength rather than destroying its cohesion.

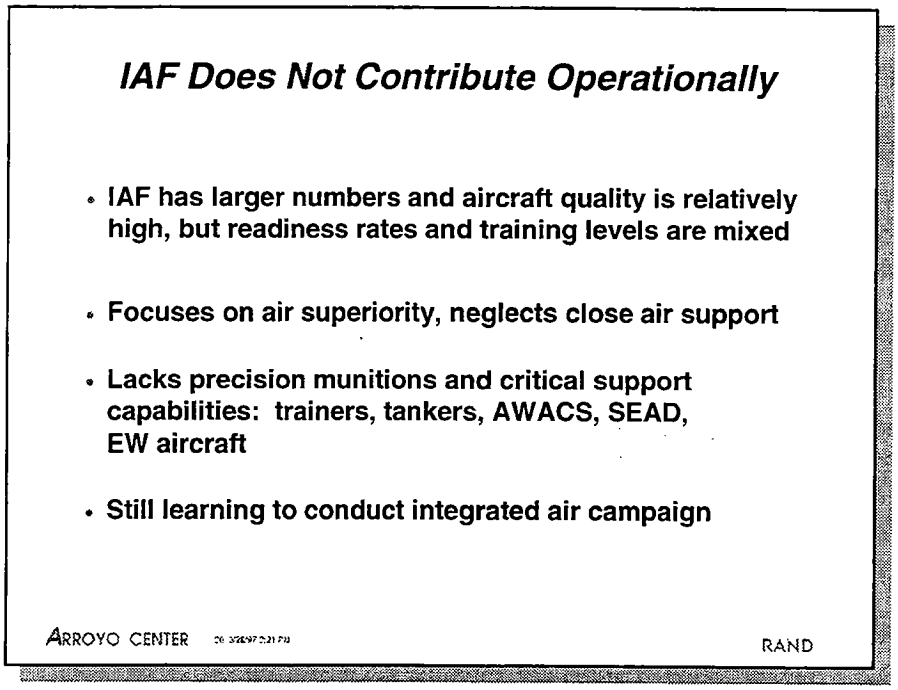
The army's organizational structure likewise reflects its inadequacy for maneuver warfare. Divided into strike corps and holding corps, the force structure does not produce the requisite aggressiveness that permits *any* field formation to exploit battlefield opportunities when they occur. This organizational encumbrance, originally owed to the colonial heritage of the Indian military, is only reinforced by highly constraining national policy directives which, insisting on the absolute

avoidance of territorial losses, preclude the development and execution of any maneuver doctrine that might make rapid and decisive victory possible.

Finally, the army does not have the resources to conduct regular, large-scale exercises of new maneuver concepts. Multicorps-level field exercises have been infrequent for budgetary reasons and will continue to be so for at least another decade. The lack of frequent field testing has prevented the perfection of new maneuver concepts and has reinforced the proclivity of each individual service to fight separate wars. Overall, the Indian armed forces have yet to develop a vision of theater-level warfare that is jointly prosecuted.

These weaknesses, however, *cannot* be heaped at the feet of the Indian armed services alone. They must also be attributed to: (1) structural imperatives, deriving from the fact that the security threats to India have never been sufficiently high to warrant serious military innovation and reform; (2) excessive civilian control over the military, resulting in a reluctance on the part of the uniformed services to take the initiative required to develop innovative operational solutions to the country's strategic problems; (3) weak higher political-military decisionmaking institutions, resulting in a paucity of authoritative guidance from civilian authority as well as a lack of opportunity for the military leadership to communicate its requirements and concerns; (4) extreme aversion to risk-taking, in part conditioned by the peculiarities of India's hierarchic social structures and ethos as well as its relative lack of confidence in international politics; (5) highly enervating internal demands, which result in the dissipation of army capabilities in the counterinsurgency mission to the consequent neglect of its capacity to train and prepare for prosecuting modern forms of conventional war; and (6) severely restricted access to funds, technology, and expertise from abroad, resulting in a stifling of Indian power capabilities in general.

In recent years, the Indian army has contemplated several efforts aimed at addressing some of these problems, and hence its limitations in maneuver warfare will not endure over the secular period (particularly if the service is provided adequate resources garnered from India's growing economy).

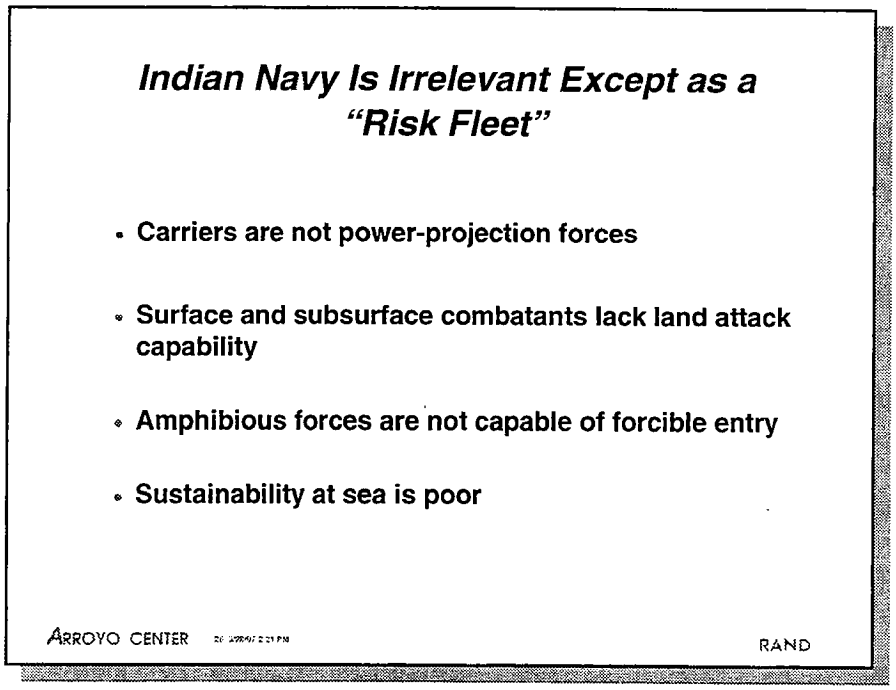


The Indian army's current weaknesses are aggravated by the inability of the Indian air force (IAF) to carry its own weight. The IAF makes a *strategic* contribution by focusing predominantly on attaining air superiority. To the degree that it has relatively better aircraft and larger numbers, it *may* even succeed in eliminating the Pakistan air force as a source of concern (if its relative technological superiority is not offset by its *relatively* poor training and mixed readiness rates).

But the IAF has not been able to translate its strategic advantages into *operational* consequences. That is, it does little to advance the Indian army's battlefield objectives. It has generally neglected close air support (CAS) and has made only minimal investments in the technologies and organizational structures required to make CAS operations effective and useful. It has not purchased cost- and mission-effective modern munitions in the required numbers. It lacks critical support capabilities like tankers and airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), and possesses only rudimentary airborne suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities.

Finally, its training regimes are still highly inadequate. IAF pilots put in just about half the flying time of their Western counterparts. The service still lacks a high-performance trainer. It has few aircraft simulators and has yet to acquire a modern instrumented air combat maneuvering range. It is also just learning how to conduct an integrated air campaign that is responsive to the needs of the theater commander. An effort at articulating an air power doctrine has just begun, and IAF personnel are known to have studied the U.S. air campaign in Operation Desert Storm with great interest.

In its efforts to overcome these deficiencies, the IAF continues to be handicapped by a shortage of funds, an Army-dominated higher military leadership, and lack of access to foreign technology and expertise. Like the other Indian services, however, it has initiated several efforts in recent years to address its outstanding problems (including by reaching out to the USAF).

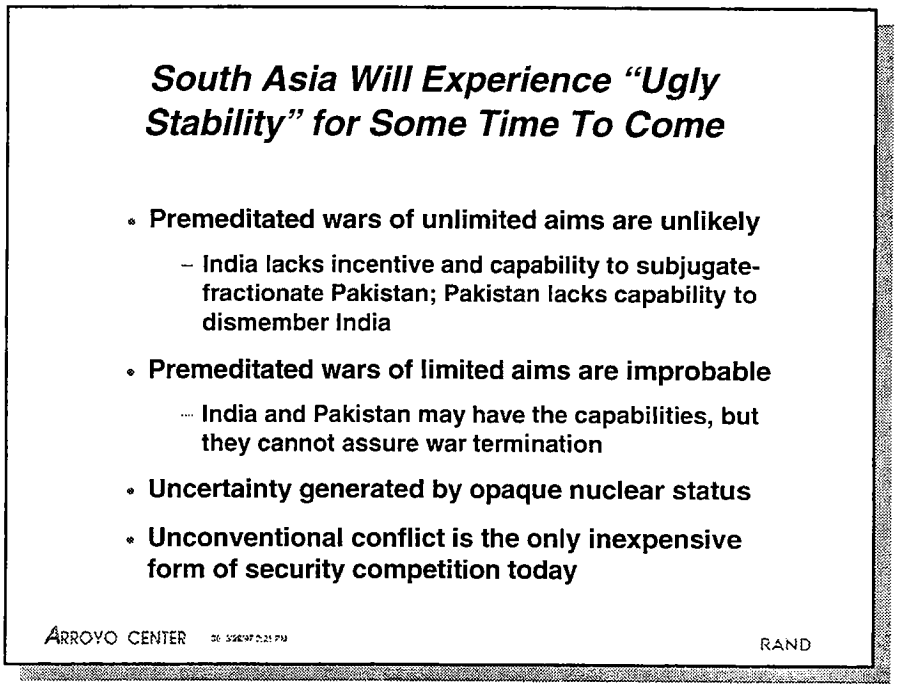


Unlike the IAF, which contributes modestly to Indian efforts at obtaining battlefield victory within the notional two- to three-week time frame, the Indian navy (IN) is all but irrelevant to warfighting outcomes in the subcontinent.

This is not because the Indian navy lacks either the technology or the requisite professionalism. Quite the contrary: the Indian navy's technology, operational skills, and personnel quality are without peer among third-world navies and by some measures actually compare quite favorably with first-world fleets. The strategic irrelevance of the Indian navy derives principally from the fact that the force as a whole is incapable of the kind of land attack and power projection operations that could tie down significant portions of the Pakistani military along the coast, thereby contributing to altering the balance of forces along the terrestrial battlefields in the north where the outcome of the war would actually be decided. As a result, naval operations in the subcontinent's short wars would be little other than a spectacular sideshow in which the Indian navy's achievements in open ocean operations and coastal raiding would still not contribute to success in the only arena that really matters: the terrestrial battlefields. So until the navy's aircraft carriers, major surface and subsurface combatants, and amphibious groups acquire the ability to influence the land battle by being able to mount credible and consequential threats of successful forcible entry, they will remain *strategically* irrelevant to warfighting outcomes in the subcontinent.

This conclusion does not hold, however, if the navy is used as a "risk fleet" to deter the threat of extraregional seaborne intervention on behalf of Pakistan in the context of an ongoing subcontinental war. In these circumstances, the Indian navy could contribute by complicating the political and strategic costs of some hypothetical extraregional intervention and thereby acquire the strategic relevance

it normally lacks in the purely Indo-Pakistani context. Planning for such contingencies dominated the navy's consciousness in the mid-to-late 1980s, but with the passing of the Cold War the relative salience of this mission has been reduced considerably. This situation may be expected to persist until the Chinese navy appears capable of operating in the Indian Ocean in a credible way.



These factors make premeditated wars of unlimited aims improbable for at least another decade, possibly more. This time frame is determined by the estimate of how long it would take India to develop the capabilities necessary to achieve decisive battlefield victory within a two- to three-week period. Given the budgetary constraints in India today, comprehensive combat force modernization is not likely to begin before the latter half of the first decade of the 21st century. Successfully integrating the new equipment and developing new operational concepts will take even longer. In the interim, a significant portion of India's military capabilities will remain inoperational, thanks to reduced resources available for maintenance and spares. The level of *effective* Indian military capabilities relative to Pakistan will, therefore, probably drop over the next decade, picking up again sometime in the first quarter of the 21st century. This assumes, of course, that Indian security managers will provide the military with the resources promised after the current restructuring of the economy is completed. But until that time, it is reasonable to conclude that India will continue to lack the capability to procure rapid and decisive battlefield victory within the context of a short war.

Even when India acquires such capabilities, however, it will still lack the incentives to *subjugate* Pakistan. India has barely succeeded in satisfactorily integrating the Muslims living in its own territory; it can hardly contemplate a conquest that would add many tens of millions of new Muslims to its already large and relatively poor Muslim population. Increasing the size of this demographic group through conquest would have a deleterious impact on both its domestic political processes and its international interests. Not surprisingly, therefore, India did not make any effort to incorporate the erstwhile province of East Pakistan after its victory in the 1971 war.

Nor would *fractionating* Pakistan advance Indian interests. This would result only in unstable polities and greater discord close to India's border. Given India's own weaknesses as a state, the fear of "contagion" effects inherent in such an outcome is sufficient to dissuade New Delhi from pursuing the fractionation of Pakistan as a policy option. The primary political objective of developing war-winning military capabilities, therefore, consists primarily of being able to reduce Pakistan's decisional autonomy, thereby deterring (and punishing, when necessary) Islamabad's capacity for "adventurism."

Pakistan may want to dismember India as a means of permanently ensuring its security and preserving its autonomy. Such an objective, however, is entertained only by a few extremist entities in Pakistani politics, not by any popular majority in Pakistan today. In any event, Islamabad simply lacks the capability to pursue such a political goal and so cannot initiate any wars of unlimited aims.

While both India and Pakistan have the military capabilities to pursue some kinds of limited-aims war (at least in theory), these conflicts are also unlikely in the foreseeable future, because fears about the success and effectiveness of military operations and concerns about horizontal and vertical escalation combine to prevent premeditated conflict at a time when neither India nor Pakistan can assure itself that war termination would occur on demand. This is the principal structural reason why Pakistan cannot contemplate a limited-aims conflict aimed at recovering Kashmir and why India cannot contemplate a punitive operation designed to penalize Pakistan for its support of Indian insurgencies. The inability of each side to satisfy itself that a limited-aims war would in fact remain limited thus serves as the principal impediment to the initiation of such conflicts in the policy-relevant future. This conclusion will continue to hold so long as Indian and Pakistani military capabilities remain roughly similar to what they are now (in relative terms), the domestic political environment in South Asia remains reasonably stable, and there is no dramatic shift in the regional balance of power.

In this context, the murky nuclear capabilities of both states only provide a redundant assurance in favor of continued deterrence stability. That said, it is important to recognize that the role of nuclear weapons in deterring war in South Asia during the post-1971 period is not as clear as many believe. Most Indian and Pakistani elites, and some American analysts, argue that the opaque nuclear arsenals in South Asia have prevented an outbreak of major war. These claims, especially those emanating from India and Pakistan, are generally suspect because they are usually advanced as part of a rhetorical strategy aimed at legitimizing the existence of the nuclear arsenals in the region. This research effort suggests that the role of nuclear weapons in assuring deterrence stability in South Asia is much more ambiguous than is commonly believed. In a strict sense, the issue is in fact *overdetermined*: the absence of major war since 1971 can be adequately explained by some combination of severe conventional weakness, the lack of political incentives to alter the existing status quo, the prohibitive costs of conventional war in the context of significant economic weaknesses on both sides, the lack of perceived

great-power support for the revisionist agendas that may have been harbored by one state or the other, as well as the presence of nuclear capabilities.

Given that these competing realities exist (of which conspicuous conventional weakness and the lack of political incentives are perhaps the most significant), it is unclear whether the absence of major war in the region can be attributed either principally or predominantly to the presence of nuclear capabilities on both sides. In fact, the absence of war during the most significant nuclear-shadowed regional crisis (1990) can be explained abundantly by the relative enervation of the Indian military (especially the army) at that point in time, an activist American diplomatic effort, and the Indian political judgment that a conventional conflict would not have solved the principal strategic problem facing the country: an indigenous Kashmiri revolt that had acquired significant Pakistani support.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the presence of nuclear weaponry plays *some* role in preventing each state from *directly* challenging the other at a time when neither is capable of attaining decisive victory in conventional war or effectively neutralizing the opponent's nuclear deterrent. How much of a role is still an open question. What is clear, however, is that nuclear weapons have exacerbated instability at the lower end of the conflict spectrum. They have allowed both India and Pakistan (particularly the latter) to engage in a variety of unconventional conflicts. And because these conflicts take place on the homelands of two collocated nuclear powers, often for stakes that involve the core interests of both sides, and in the presence of relatively weak nuclear arsenals and severe asymmetries in the capacity of India and Pakistan to accept damage, it is often feared that what begins as "low-intensity"competition may not remain such under all circumstances. While such fears are genuine, they are—at least for the moment—overstated, because both India and Pakistan seem to have recognized the perils of escalation and have—if the past is any indication—acted to restrain their rivalry from boiling over. This restraint derives from the simple reason that an inadvertent conflict would not serve any political interest when premeditated conflicts are unable to conclusively resolve the outstanding disputes between both states.

Since conventional conflicts are judged to be implausible for a combination of both military and political reasons, unconventional conflicts—in the form of either state-supported terrorism or state-supported insurgency—will remain the principal form of security competition in South Asia in the immediate future. Such conflicts, which arise mainly as a result of domestic dissidence attracting covert support from the other side, will represent the face of ugly stability in South Asia for some time to come. These conflicts will endure so long as: the conventional military forces on both sides remain relatively ineffective in the context of the demands imposed by short wars; the nuclear capabilities of both states remain immune to decapitation; the prospects of war widening are seen by both sides as remote; the domestic political environment in one and possibly both states is unsettling; and the kind of foreign intervention that could conclusively prevent any escalation of conflict is perceived to be uncertain. Since most of these conditions, especially the first, are

expected to obtain for at least another decade (and possibly more), it is reasonable to conclude that South Asia will continue to enjoy conventional deterrence stability of the kind witnessed in the post-1971 period, even though this stability will be "ugly" in that it entails a relatively high degree of subconventional violence on at least one side, perhaps both.

Outline

- Security competition in South Asia
- Relative military capabilities and constraints
- National strategies and deterrence instability
- Implications for the U.S. Army



To understand the dynamics of security competition and the prospects for future deterrence breakdown in South Asia, it is important to recognize the changes that are taking place in the region's key states.

Since the early 1990s, India has made a serious and comprehensive bid for great-power capabilities. It has initiated economic reforms designed to reduce state controls on the industrial sector and to open up the economy to foreign investment. Although the process is far from complete, there is a remarkable consensus within India about the need to pursue some kind of reform program to completion. *If* this process concludes successfully, resulting especially in increased investments in physical infrastructure, power, communications, and agriculture, India's productive potential will be unleashed, and the country could become the third pole—along with China and Japan—in future Asian geopolitics.

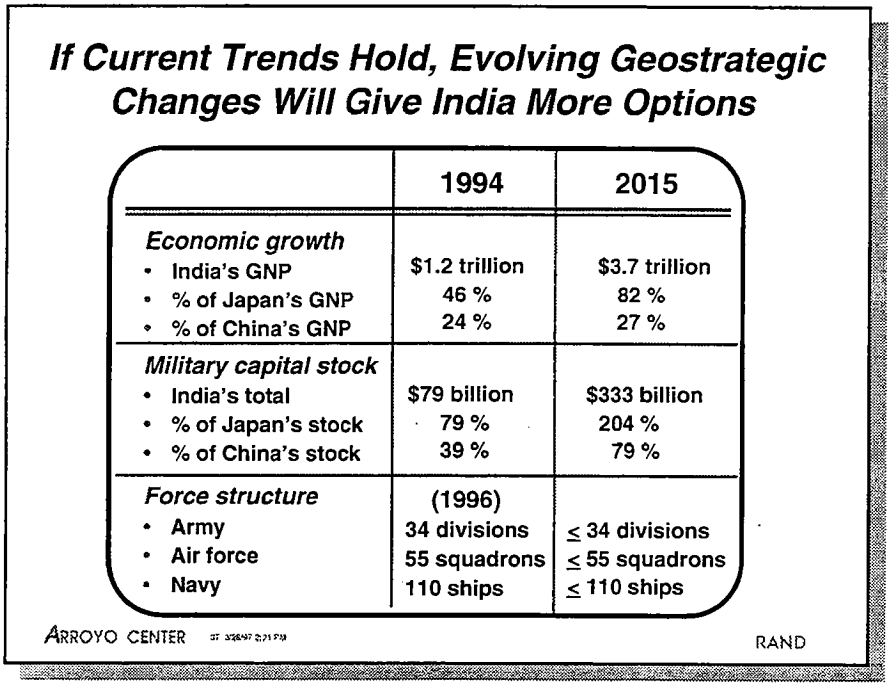
India has also begun grappling with the demands of internal political restructuring. Because India already has a federal constitution, this process requires few legal innovations. Rather, it requires greater conformity with the spirit of its constitution and a reformation of conventional political practices. This process is already under way, thanks to the rise of new regional parties, powerful state leaders, and renewed activism on the part of Indian institutions like the judiciary. Power *is* slowly devolving back to the states. Such a dynamic will be further reinforced as center-state financial relations are revamped. If this process succeeds, India could enjoy the best of both national unity and regional autonomy.

India has also begun to make concerted efforts to acquire advanced technological capabilities in the civilian, dual-use, and military sectors. In fact, acquiring and "domesticating" advanced technologies has been affirmed as a national goal, and several decade-long initiatives have been unveiled in recent years.

In the security realm, India has eschewed the path of increased military investments. Defense expenditures, which hovered between 3 and 4 percent of GNP during the 1980s, have been cut to about 2.5 percent of GNP during the 1990s. These reductions in military spending are deliberate—some, in fact, argue that they are dangerous, but to no avail—and have been designed to provide maximum room for sustained economic growth during the next decade and beyond. This approach to "capitalization" has been designed, among other things, to maximize India's power potential over the longer term with an eye to possible rivalry with China. In several interviews with the author in the winter of 1995, Indian security managers portrayed the next ten years primarily as a period of conservation. The 2005–2015 time frame was viewed possibly as a period of renewed acquisition, with the 2015–2025 time frame a period of integration and consolidation. While these cutoff points are by no means sacrosanct, they do suggest that Indian policymakers are focusing their current attention not on acquiring large-scale weapons (though some critical acquisitions will still occur) but on improving the domestic military technology base, becoming familiar with new and innovative doctrine, and thinking about improvements in logistics and organization. Though these efforts have barely begun, at least the shift in preference is by now clear.

Finally, India is concentrating on improving its political and economic relations with key states. This includes a renewed dialog with the United States, improved relations with China, restored ties with Russia, and new attempts to reach out to intermediate states like Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and especially the "tigers" of East and Southeast Asia. More recently, India has also concentrated on improving relations with its smaller South Asian neighbors, who are occasionally tempted to make common cause with Pakistan. What is most significant about Indian strategic policy in the post–Cold War era, however, is that a new relationship with the United States is deemed critical, and economic and political links with the United States have deepened considerably in recent years. Today, the United States is India's largest trading partner, and India is the fifth most important location for U.S. manufacturing abroad. These ties have been complemented by a deliberate "look east" strategy aimed at engaging the influential regional actors located within the Asia-Pacific region.

All in all, there appears to be a resurgence of optimism about India's ability to recover its bearings. For its reform program to bear fruit, however, the domestic framework of liberal and secular politics must survive in the face of new pressure groups mouthing religious and ethnic idioms. India must also weather the emerging political struggle between its rich-middle and depressed classes in a way that sustains continued growth and expansion rather than dissipates its energies in a class conflict over economic redistribution. If these two developments can be assured, India's reform program may finally bequeath New Delhi with the great-power capabilities it so deeply desires.



A successful Indian reform program would dramatically transform regional politics. It would presage a power transition that places India among the most important actors in Asia—a geostrategic change that would increase India's political options vis-à-vis Pakistan and other great powers.

Studies undertaken at RAND by Charles Wolf, Jr., et al. (most notably his *Long-Term Economic and Military Trends, 1994–2015* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995) suggest that, assuming a conservative growth rate of 5.5 percent, the Indian economy will rise from $1.2 trillion in 1994 to $3.7 trillion in 2015, measured in terms of purchasing power parity. In comparative terms, this represents an increase from 46 percent of Japan's 1994 GNP to 82 percent in 2015. Similarly, on the heroic assumption that China continues to grow at its present rate of over 12 percent, by 2015 India's GNP will increase from 24 percent of China's total to 27 percent. (Since the Chinese economy will probably not be able to sustain this growth rate over the long term, the relative size of the Indian economy is likely to be larger.) Other studies conducted at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank generally corroborate Wolf's assessments. (See page 75 of the appendix for the World Bank's assessment of India's relative economic standing in the year 2020.)

Similarly, Wolf's analysis suggests that India's military capital stock is expected to show dramatic improvement. From 79 percent of Japan's 1994 stock, it increases to 204 percent of its 2015 stock (assuming Japanese military growth does not exceed 1 percent of GNP). It is expected to constitute 79 percent of China's military capital stock by 2015 if growth in China is stable and to surpass that stock if China's growth is disrupted.

To be sure, all such projections about economic growth over long periods of time must be treated with caution. Various unforeseeable developments could occur

over the next two decades, thereby upsetting the expectations detailed above. But for purposes of understanding the issue of stability in South Asia, there are basically two questions to be answered: First, are the general trend lines in Indian economic performance positive or negative? Second, how does India's relative performance stack up against Pakistan's? The answers to these two questions will in effect determine whether there is a coming power transition in South Asia or not. And—at least in response to the first question—the general consensus among analysts today seems to be that the Indian economy appears poised for relatively rapid growth, if the reforms begun earlier continue steadily. If this judgment is correct, India's economic expansion will have significant strategic consequences, *even if all the projections described above ultimately turn out to be erroneous in the detail.*

If the increase in Indian GNP occurs as expected, it also implies that India will be able to sustain a larger, or at any rate more effective, force structure than currently exists. Although it is not possible to predict the exact size of the Indian military two decades or so from now, the desired force size identified by the Indian military itself in the past is instructive. The Army 2000 Plan had specified an expansion from the current 34 divisions to a total of 40 divisions with larger proportions of armored and mechanized units. Where air forces are concerned, Air Chief Marshall Dilbagh Singh suggested as far back as the 1970s that a 70-squadron combat strength would be optimal, given India's threat environment. The navy's 1978 expansion plan called for an increase in service size from the current total of 110 ships to about 200 ships.

Whether a force structure of this size materializes in the 2015+ time frame cannot be forecast right now. It depends on the level of resources available to the military over the next two decades and the attitude India adopts toward the coming "revolution in military affairs." In the interim, India's force size will in fact probably drop simply under pressures of fiscal necessity. But as its ongoing economic reforms bequeath their rewards, India's military power will probably increase in *effective capability*, even if the same is not reflected in numerically larger force sizes. All things considered, therefore, the Indian military will probably maintain a force structure sized just about the same as at present—or maybe even smaller—but it will be a force much more effective in combat potential than the one currently in existence.



While India concentrates on acquiring comprehensive great-power capabilities, Pakistan has been obsessed by the chimera of recovering Kashmir to the neglect of serious and consequential domestic challenges. This obsession with Kashmir, which was more or less muted from 1971 onward, resurfaced in 1989 as a result of the first genuinely popular Kashmiri uprising against New Delhi. Since then, supporting the insurgency and securing international support for a plebiscite in Kashmir have remained the centerpiece of Pakistan's national policy, even though this has led to continued tensions with India and, until very recently, the disruption of all dialog between the two states. These political responses, predicated in part by the logic of Pakistan's Kashmir position and in part by the imperatives of domestic politics, have resulted in a neglect of the core weaknesses facing the Pakistani state. This, in turn, could make the hypothesized power transition in South Asia a reality as well as lead to grave dangers.

Pakistan continues to be hampered by a lack of political consensus among its elites with respect to the desired nature of the state. In effect, the centrist middle is divided by powerful competing personalities who despise each other; the extreme right, consisting of various Islamic parties, continues to buffet the otherwise moderate ruling regimes in generally undesirable fashion; and the all-powerful bureaucracies have no choice but to watch the oscillating crises of governability from the sidelines. In effect, the polity has been unable to define—positively—the kind of state Pakistan ought to be and, except for freedom from "Hindu domination," has not developed a national consensus on the political goals it ought to pursue.

This crisis is reflected in the simmering national divisions that episodically plague the polity. The most recent civil war with the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM) in

Karachi is merely one in a long line of ethnic revolts. While such revolts also occur with similar frequency in India, the situation in Pakistan is different for two important reasons: in India, insurgencies against the state usually arise because of political manipulations of the democratic process. In Pakistan, the democratic process is imperfectly institutionalized to begin with, and even universal electoral suffrage has thus far been incapable of resolving structural inequalities like the domination of the Punjab, the crushing lock of feudal social structures, and the as-yet unresolved tension in center-province relations. At the end of the day, however, India has another advantage that Pakistan does not: its enormous size, which enables it to quarantine political discord occurring within any given region and thus prevent any paralysis of the national polity. Being a more powerful state only gives it access to a wider range of strategies that can be used in response to its domestic challengers. Pakistan, in comparison, has far fewer political resources to deal with its insurgencies.

The program of economic reforms, especially those undertaken during the most recent Bhutto regime, have generally produced a great deal of public dissatisfaction with both the governing apparatus and the international organizations that support it. Recent waves of privatization have been mired in serious corruption scandals, with large sections of the populace believing that the divestiture process has been compromised to the advantage of powerful suitors connected with the Bhutto family. Even more problematically, however, the reform process was initiated, and continues to the degree it does, only because of the iron hand of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Having been intermittently on- and off-track, reforms could be reversed once the period of supervision ends. True internal restructuring, in the form of legislative measures, enforcement mechanisms, and institutions and processes for review and corrective action, has barely begun in Pakistan.

Pakistan also continues to make feeble improvements to its technology base. In part, this reflects the inherent weaknesses of its economy; the poor access to foreign technology; and the traditionally tight hold enjoyed by Pakistan's feudal elites. The lack of access to U.S. assistance for most of the 1990s has also had negative effects. Consequently, Pakistan remains, like India, a significantly agricultural society but with a much smaller and narrower industrial-technology base. In fact, improvements in Pakistan's indigenous industrial-technological capacity are ambiguous, if statistics about the structure of trade are any indication: from 1970 to 1992, Pakistan's import of machinery as a percentage of merchandise imports increased (in contrast to India, where machinery imports have decreased); during the same period, Pakistan's export of machinery as a percentage of merchandise exports was insignificant (in contrast to India, where machinery exports actually increased).

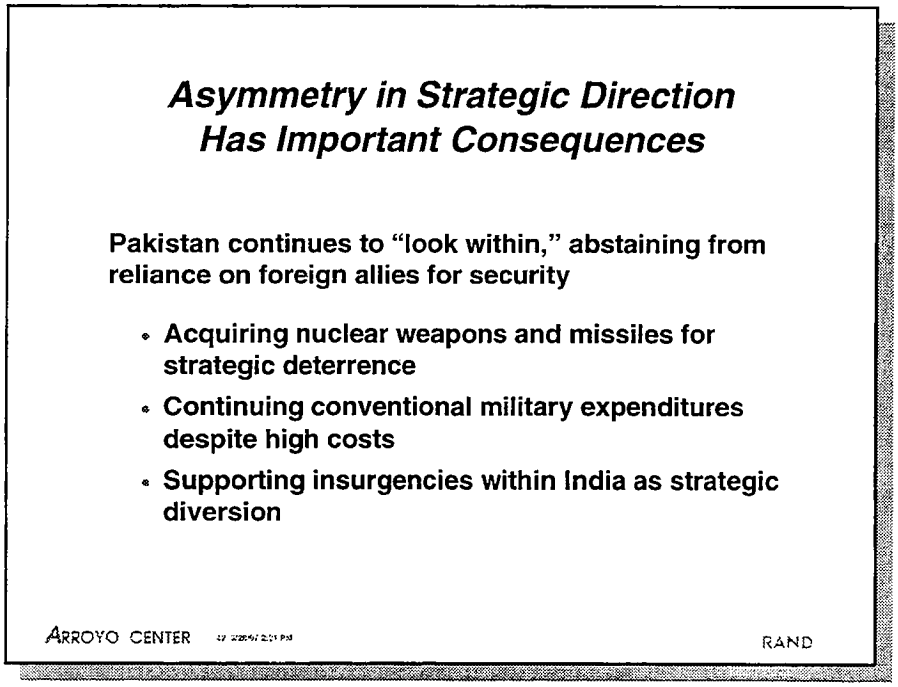
Pakistan has also experienced weakening access to foreign military equipment, especially in the aftermath of the cutoff in American assistance. Here, Pakistan is trapped in a vicious circle: the United States will not allow access to its military technology so long as Pakistan continues to pursue its nuclear program, which

Islamabad has no intention of giving up. High budgetary stringency prevents Pakistan from procuring the best available military equipment from suppliers outside the United States. This dilemma will not be resolved anytime soon.

Finally, Pakistan has been hurt more than India by the end of the Cold War. The elimination of superpower competition reduced Pakistan's geostrategic importance and removed American incentives to continue supporting it. Moreover, Islamabad's decisions with respect to its nuclear program could not have come at a worse time. These decisions, in effect, resulted in the United States cutting Pakistan adrift, and Islamabad has been unable to compensate for that loss by making any real advances with other extraregional powers. Hopes for new relations with Russia have not materialized; even China, while continuing to remain a source of nuclear assistance, has turned its back on Pakistan where important issues like Kashmir are concerned. Pakistan's valiant efforts to develop lucrative relations with the Central Asian states have not yet been as successful as hoped for.

All things considered, the prospects for Pakistan's long-term renewal are difficult to judge, but the signs thus far have not been reassuring. It is clear that large segments of the elite population want to embark on revitalizing Pakistani society. But the issue is more complex than simply confining the military to its barracks. It also involves resolving delicate problems of constitutional balance, developing a healthy political culture, arriving at a stable accommodation between the dominant feudal elites and the rising bourgeoisie, diminishing the hegemony of the Punjab, and, finally, creating a consensus within the polity on the desired nature of the Pakistani state apart from its traditional negative objective of representing freedom from India.

Efforts so far have been hesitant, and overall progress has been stymied by continual bickering among Pakistan's civilian elites. Pakistan is in many ways a beleaguered state, and reform must simultaneously achieve both economic revitalization and fundamental political restructuring. Consequently, the Pakistani program of renewal bears a much greater burden than the comparable effort occurring in India, a fact often reflected both in the periodic political crises affecting the state and in the pessimism that episodically pervades the country and its elites.



The divergence in direction between India and Pakistan has important political consequences. Among its most critical effects has been a reinforcement of Pakistan's proclivity to "look within," a strategy that actually dates back to the aftermath of the 1971 war, when Pakistan realized that none of the states envisaged as external protectors, including that vaunted ally China, were either inclined or able to rush to Islamabad's defense when it needed them most. Since then, Islamabad has sought to rely on its own resources rather than on foreign allies for its security. How this strategy has been operationalized, however, is potentially problematic and could exacerbate security competition in South Asia in the future.

The chief ingredient of the strategy of self-reliance consists of acquiring nuclear weapons and associated delivery systems. These capabilities are intended as a substitute for great-power protection, and to that degree they represent a fairly understandable method of enhancing the security of an isolated and vulnerable state. The problem, however, is that the United States looks askance at Pakistan's nuclear program (and India's for that matter), seeing these programs as undercutting its global antiproliferation policies. Under significant U.S. pressure, the Pakistani program for producing highly enriched uranium has ostensibly been capped since about 1990. This may produce the unexpected result of Pakistan's having enough nuclear weapons to be dangerous but not enough to be really safe (especially in the context of a crisis).

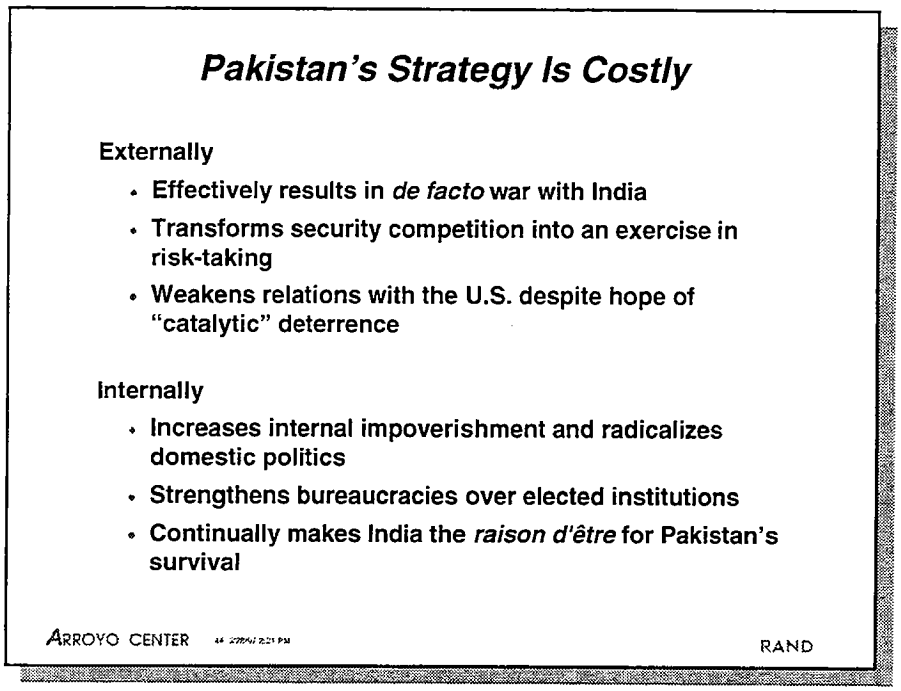
Second, Pakistan has supplemented its nuclear capabilities by continued investments in conventional military instruments, despite their high cost and their immense burdens on the national economy. The defense budget continues to be sized at 5 to 7 percent of GNP, which (even if it is, as the cynics allege, an underestimate) remains the highest in South Asia. Such expenditures are seen as vital to assuring Pakistan's security in the high-threat environment it subsists in.

The third, and perhaps most problematic, prong of Pakistan's strategy of self-reliance consists of wearing India down through support of its internal insurgencies whenever suitable opportunities arise. It must be emphasized, however, that despite much Indian rhetoric to the contrary, no insurgencies in India have materialized simply as a result of Pakistani sponsorship. In fact, all Pakistani efforts to sponsor insurgency in India have failed abysmally—witness Kashmir in the late 1940s, the early 1950s, and the mid-1960s. The Indian insurgencies that have survived long enough to become troublesome to New Delhi have *purely* indigenous roots.

Three developments have supported the evolution of such a diversionary strategy. First, the segmented nature of the Pakistani state has enabled powerful bureaucracies, like the intelligence services and the military, to pursue policies that may not be ratified by the polity at large. Second, the Pakistani intelligence services (once assisted by the United States, among many others) enabled the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan to successfully defeat Soviet occupation, thus inadvertently giving rise to a belief that a similar strategy could be replicated vis-à-vis India. Third, the acquisition of nuclear capability by Pakistan has made weakening India through unconventional conflict a viable strategy because New Delhi presumably would find it too expensive to retaliate by means of either conventional or nuclear war.

Whether keeping India "off-balance" will survive as an *integral* component of Pakistan's future strategy of self-reliance will depend on: the future evolution of the Pakistani state; the nature of Indian attitudes and actions vis-à-vis Pakistan; and the success of India's own efforts at state-building. For the moment, however, it appears to be reasonably successful; several Pakistani security managers see it as little other than an emulation of India's own strategy in 1971, and so long as such attitudes persist, "strategic diversion" must be reckoned with as a quasi-permanently operating factor in South Asian security competition. This is particularly true with respect to the issue of Kashmir, where Islamabad, thanks to its traditional claims on the state, feels that *it has no choice but to support the Kashmiris*—through armed assistance if necessary—in their struggle against New Delhi. This compulsion is driven both by considerations of domestic politics and by Pakistan's legal-diplomatic position on Kashmir; these factors force Pakistan to pursue what is in effect an all-or-nothing policy that almost guarantees continued conflict with India.

When considered as an integrated whole, however, the strategy of "looking within" is seen as the best of the worst possible choices available to Pakistan. Despite its generally problematic character, it is viewed as the *maximin* solution that can provide Pakistan with security without any outside assistance. Each component plays a unique role. Nuclear weapons immunize Pakistan against the worst Indian military depredations imaginable. In Islamabad's calculations, they also provide a degree of latitude that allows for the support of Indian insurgencies as an additional means of whittling down New Delhi's military advantages, which might otherwise be directed against Pakistan. Continued conventional military investments checkmate those Indian military capabilities not encumbered by counterinsurgency demands, while simultaneously providing the initial means of resistance should deterrence break down.



Pakistan's look-within strategy, as manifested in the forms evidenced during the post–Cold War era, is a costly strategy across both external and internal dimensions. It could reduce Pakistan's security over time, while increasing the potential for conflict with India in the interim.

External Costs

First, the strategy results in a *de facto* state of war with India. Although intended inter alia as a low-cost means of wearing India down, Pakistani support for Indian insurgencies intersects squarely with the weaknesses of the Indian state. These weaknesses transform what would otherwise be just another political nuisance into a concerted challenge levied at India's core objective: preserving a stable multi-ethnic state with claims to greatness. Because these objectives are effectively challenged, the door is opened to conventional conflicts resulting either from deliberate Indian retaliation, Indian efforts to play tit-for-tat, or inadvertent action, miscalculation, or misperception on both sides.

Second, Pakistani efforts to keep India off-balance degenerate into a dangerous exercise in risk-taking. Because Pakistani strategies challenge core Indian objectives, New Delhi is forced to develop a range of compensating counterresponses. At an extreme, this could involve adopting strategies aimed at escalation dominance. Such strategies derive from the Indian belief that Pakistan's nuclear capabilities are small and, even if adequate in the near term, will become increasingly inconsequential when measured against the totality of India's evolving strength. Where nuclear strategies are concerned, India derives additional consolation from the extant asymmetries in size. These asymmetries effectively imply that a nuclear exchange would result in the complete destruction of Pakistan but only limited, though still

grave, damage to India. This asymmetry in post-conflict reconstitution capability sets limits upon Pakistan's ability to bear risks.

Third, Pakistan's relations with the United States are weakened. Pakistan's public rationale for its nuclear weapons centers on deterring Indian aggression. However, because of the asymmetry between Indian and Pakistani vulnerabilities, the deterrent value of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is much lower than advertised. Hence, its real utility derives more from its ability to inveigle the United States (or some other great power like China) into intervening in South Asia in the context of nuclear threats than from the likelihood of independently deterring India. Such a strategy could become problematic insofar as it relies on the United States to bail out Pakistan from crises that may be ultimately of Islamabad's own making. It is doubly risky because the United States looks with a jaundiced eye at Pakistan's nuclear program in particular and, in general, at all efforts at promoting territorial revisionism through force of arms.

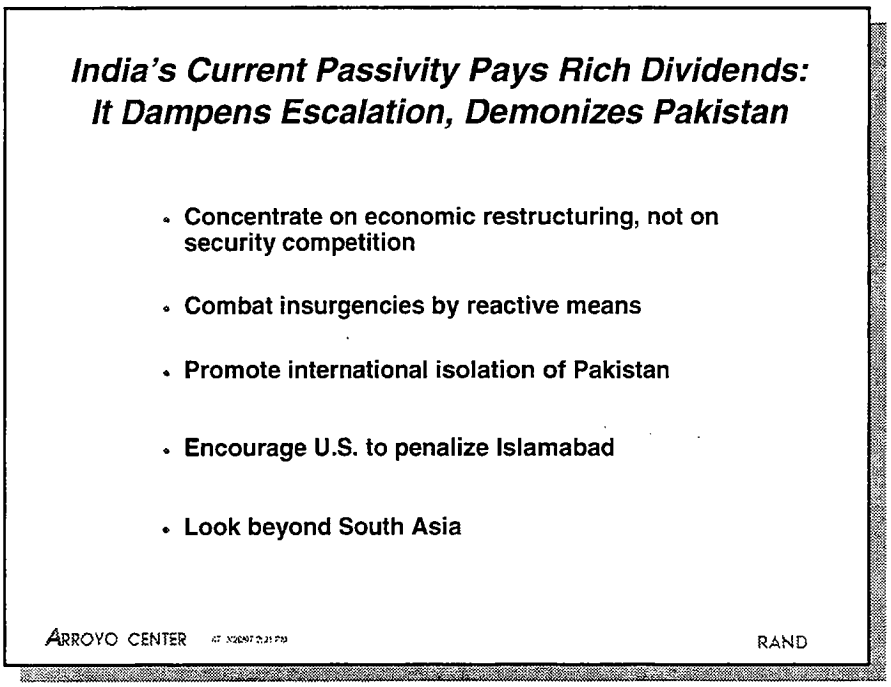
Internal Costs

First, Pakistan's security strategy reduces the discretionary surplus in the national budget. Debt servicing and military expenditures currently consume more than 50 percent of central government expenditures. When components like administrative expenses and law and order are added, the nondiscretionary elements of central expenditures total close to 70 percent. Continued high levels of military spending leave even less room for development expenditures in a state that already has very low social indicators. This leads to a further radicalization of domestic politics and increases fears about the long-term stability of the Pakistani state.

Second, internal political restructuring is retarded. A strategy requiring high security expenditures and significant covert action tends to increase the state's reliance on unelected bureaucracies like the army, intelligence services, and civil service. To that degree, it strengthens the elements of Pakistan's praetorian past and further delays the political restructuring necessary for the nation's survival over the long term. The real tragedy today, however, is not the role played by the Pakistani military but the failure of Pakistan's civilian leadership. The higher leadership of the Pakistan army currently is highly professional and very moderate, and it prefers to avoid meddling with India to the maximum degree possible. The civilian leadership, on the other hand, is weak and uninspiring: thanks to their domestic weaknesses, the major political parties continue to seek favors from the military and civilian bureaucracies in an effort to outwit their opponents, and the national government, in fact, has continued to authorize covert action by the secret services against India for reasons connected as much with domestic stability as with strategic interests.

Third, fear of India has become the principal reason for Pakistan's existence, preventing the development of "a positive expression of national existence." This reinforces the cycle of distrust in the Indian subcontinent: it perpetuates an excessive fear of Indian intentions; it leads to an increased reliance on Islamist notions of transnational solidarity for security; it sustains a world view that is

defined exclusively in insular religious terms and is often poorly informed about the world at large. Overall, it prevents Pakistan from developing a national ethos that is modern and can be sustained outside of considerations about India. The absence of such an alternative ethos also ironically implies that partition never truly separated Pakistan from India.



Deterrence breakdown, however, has been generally avoided (at least, for the moment) because of Indian passivity and restraint. This response, which is owed partly to otiose decisionmaking and partly to calculation, is driven less by high-mindedness than by strategic necessity: India simply cannot afford an armed conflict at the present time, for both political and economic reasons. Strategic restraint, therefore, provides the requisite breathing room for the economic restructuring currently under way to be completed successfully. It also contributes to dampening escalation and produces the useful effect of demonizing Pakistan.

As a political strategy, it appears to have five interrelated components.

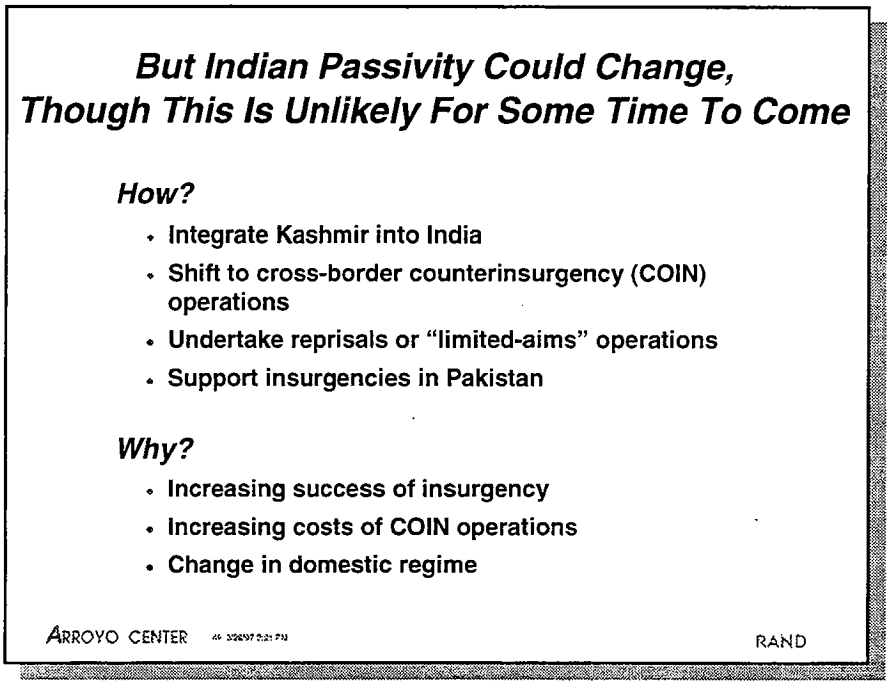
The first element is the focus on economic restructuring, not security competition. This restructuring is seen to be vital both for reasons of domestic stability and in order to cope with rising regional competitors like China in the future. Consequently, India, beginning to "look outward," has sought to purchase geopolitical tranquillity so that its internal transformations may progress uninterrupted by external shocks.

The second element is the attention paid to preventing ongoing security problems from overwhelming the processes of reform. At a minimum, this has involved preventing troubled spots like Kashmir and the Northeast from psychologically impinging on domestic renewal. As a complement, there has also been a conscious effort to keep the peace locally. This has included *deliberate* policy decisions not to expand the counterinsurgency operations in Kashmir to include cross-border operations of any kind, but instead to restrict the employment of security forces to reactive operations alone within Indian territory.

This effort at maintaining "local peace" to the maximum degree possible is only part of a larger attempt at consciously engaging various external actors in an effort to restrain Islamabad. This constitutes the third element of the strategy and it includes orchestrating the condemnation of Pakistan and its "revisionist" agenda in Kashmir in various international forums as well as securing communiqués of support from various European and Asian capitals in support of India's policy of "moderation."

The fourth element consists of consistently encouraging the United States to penalize Islamabad. Historically, this included supporting a comprehensive application of the Pressler Amendment and opposition to the Brown Amendment. Beyond this, India has attempted—though without much success—to persuade the United States to place Pakistan on its list of terrorist states. And, in general, India has attempted to discredit Pakistani claims about pursuing a desirable version of politically moderate Islam.

Above all—and this is the fifth and perhaps most important element over the long term—India has made a concerted effort to look beyond the constraining environs of South Asia in order to pursue the larger great-power capabilities that eluded it throughout the Cold War. This new approach does not involve abjuring the quest for hegemony within the Indian subcontinent. It merely implies that the requisites for local hegemony would now be treated as a "lesser included capability" that automatically derives from India's capacity to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the great powers in Asia and beyond. Toward that end, India has begun a series of economic and political efforts designed to put its own house in order even as it has attempted to "ignore" Pakistan—to the degree possible—and focus on more potentially profitable policies like co-opting the United States. Despite the difficulties associated with successfully executing such a policy—Pakistan continues to be a source of resistance demanding more Indian attention than is judged worthwhile, while relations with the United States have not always borne the kind of fruit that India has hoped for—New Delhi recognizes that the new Indian grand strategy of looking beyond South Asia offers the best hope for realizing India's traditional dreams of great-power status.



The Indian strategy of political-military restraint is in many ways a product of the personal preferences of India's former Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao. His successors may not choose to continue this policy *if* Pakistani-supported insurgencies become more successful in the future, *if* the cost of combating insurgency through reactive means alone rises exponentially, or *if* an activist government or coalition of decisionmakers appears in New Delhi.

Thus, Indian strategy could shift in different directions. India might choose to legally integrate Kashmir into India, as is often advocated by parties like the BJP. This would involve repealing Article 370 of the Indian constitution, thereby eliminating the fiction that Kashmir is a disputed state. The current United Front Government has eschewed pursuing such a politically provocative option, but its successors may—under different circumstances—feel no similar necessity for restraint.

India could also shift to an offensive counterinsurgency strategy involving significant cross-border operations—hot pursuit, air attacks on sanctuaries and training camps, and special operations—combined with heightened internal repression. This approach might be extended through reprisal operations aimed at Pakistani targets for punitive reasons, including but not limited to destroying intelligence training facilities. In the extreme case, it might also include shallow limited-aims operations involving joint land and air force operations.

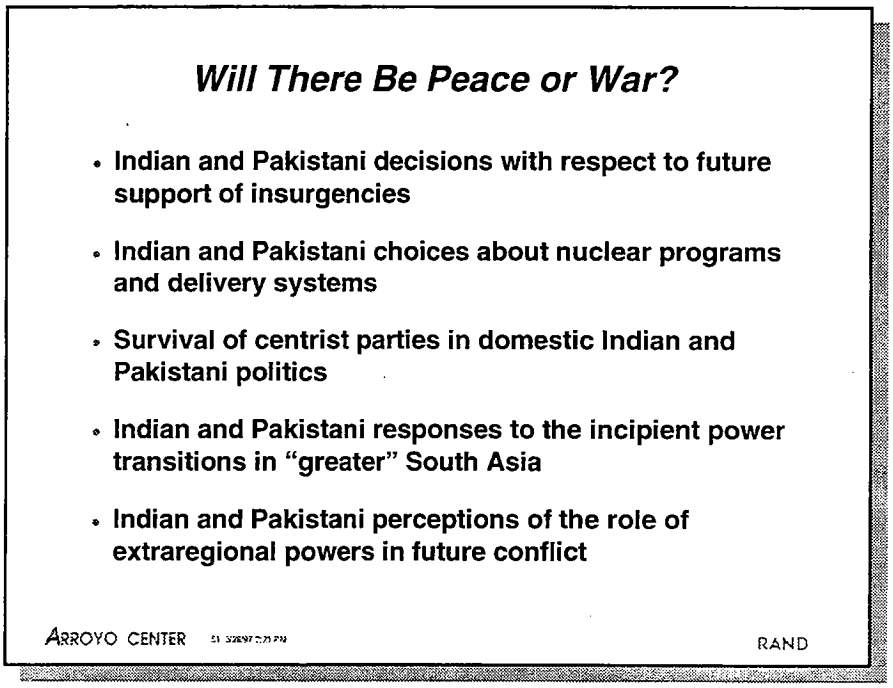
Finally, India might foment or support insurgencies within Pakistan. This option would be attractive if conventional forms of retaliation seemed too costly, if Pakistan's nuclear holdings could not be neutralized without unacceptable risk, and if the international community appeared too complacent in the face of continued Pakistani needling. Pakistan's own structural vulnerabilities could make such an

option increasingly attractive over time, particularly if a highly risk-averse coalition of individuals dominates the center of power in India. The execution of such a strategy, especially if it occurs in full-fledged fashion à la 1971, could mean civil war in Pakistan, possibly a generalized Indo-Pakistani war that could include nuclear threats and use, and—if such outcomes ensue—perhaps even the demise of Pakistan as a state. While India certainly would not prefer the last outcome a priori (and, hence, may not intend to pursue such a strategy of subversion to its logical conclusion), the door to miscalculation and unintended consequences would be nonetheless opened by such Indian initiatives. Here, the weaknesses of the Pakistani state could come to haunt Islamabad even more than it has previously experienced.

For the foreseeable future, however, India is unlikely to pursue any of these more provocative alternatives. This is because the costs of these alternative options are judged to be unaffordable, given the singular Indian interest in seeing the country's economic reform program carried successfully to completion. This dominating interest in internal economic-political reform, in fact, represents the most defining element of the changes in Indian grand strategy since the end of the Cold War. For perhaps the first time since independence, all elements of the Indian political spectrum are convinced that transforming India into a vibrant market economy remains the only way the country can attain the great-power capabilities that have eluded it so far. As a result, no major political party in India—including the BJP—sees Indian interests today and for the foreseeable future served by switching to any alternative strategy that increases local security competition to the detriment of internal restructuring.

This conviction is only reinforced by the calculation that India has sufficient domestic resources to absorb the costs of any Pakistani needling without recourse to more provocative alternatives. The uprising in Kashmir, for example, has already been more or less contained without any deleterious effect on the national economy; the ongoing insurgencies in the Indian northeast have not made a dent in India's political, fiscal, and psychological capacity either. Most Indian security managers point out that India also survived the worst of the Sikh insurgency in the previous decade without any need to shift from reactive military operations internally to proactive military operations externally.

Consequently, India's large size, its significant economic and military capabilities, and its great political endurance combine with a new, more recent, emphasis on economic renewal to prevent its current strategy of restraint from shifting toward a more provocative set of options directed at Pakistan. This strategy of restraint will in all likelihood survive any change of government that may occur in India in the future, simply because all the major political parties today believe that internal renewal not only provides a better means to address the domestic challenges confronting the country but also will more effectively procure those great-power capabilities India seeks in comparison to many other forms of security competition imaginable.



For all the reasons advanced earlier, South Asia is likely to experience a period of "ugly stability," at least in the foreseeable future. The outcomes of war and peace over the longer term, however, would depend on five critical factors which merit continued observation by the United States.

The first factor is Indian and Pakistani decisions about supporting insurgencies in each other's territory. Two sets of decisions are crucial. The first relates to the choices Pakistan makes in the near future about the present insurgency in Kashmir. The Kashmiri rebellion has for all practical purposes reached the limits of its success and may have diminishing popular support. Whether Pakistan chooses to escalate by altering either the quantity or the quality of support to the insurgents will make an important difference to future security competition.

India's choices are equally crucial. Will future Indian governments continue the Rao regime's strategy of restraint, or will they shift to a more aggressive tit-for-tat strategy? Indian and Pakistani decisions here are in some sense interdependent. Immediate Pakistani choices with respect to Kashmir could affect the prospects of change in present Indian attitudes toward conventional retaliation and, in particular, with respect to future Indian support for insurgencies in Pakistan.

In a more general sense, however, long-term stability in South Asia will depend on recognition by Islamabad and New Delhi that—as a form of state policy—the support of insurgencies in each other's territory is ultimately undesirable because it is always an unstable strategy. If it is to succeed, the insurgency must pinch the host country enough to make it worthwhile as a means of strategic diversion but not so much that it precipitates serious conventional conflict. Guaranteeing such a "delicate balance of instability" is all but impossible and cannot be assured over the long haul. Consequently, decisions about strategic diversion may well have the greatest effect on war-or-peace outcomes over the long term.

The second factor is Indian and Pakistani decisions about their nuclear programs and delivery systems in the future. These will determine the future of deterrence stability in South Asia because even if nuclear weapons are less than relevant for local stability today, they will only become more—not less—relevant over time as the asymmetries in power capability between India and Pakistan increase. This issue was in many ways a staple during the Cold War, and as a result of that experience, the requirements of stable deterrence are well understood. But there are five kinds of problems that make the South Asian case special.

- India and Pakistan currently have relatively modest nuclear capabilities, with the result that the threat of comprehensive societal destruction is unlikely to function as a brake on political action like it did during the Cold War. This is certainly more true for India than Pakistan, but in any event the small number of nuclear weapons, the relatively provocative character of some of the delivery systems, the questionable command-and-control arrangements, the severely limited intelligence and warning systems, the casual attitudes to nuclear deterrence, the lack of a clear and articulated deterrence doctrine, and the presence of few confidence-building measures all combine to make successful deterrence stability a less-than-automatic outcome.
- India and Pakistan are relatively poor states and may not possess the resources necessary to acquire the relevant technological fixes for stability, if such fixes are required on an ongoing basis.
- Both states are pursuing their nuclear programs in the face of concerted international opposition. This suggests that open foreign assistance is not available and that acquisitions and deployment decisions must be made outside of public debate and scrutiny.
- India and Pakistan are collocated but asymmetrically sized competitors. Technical requirements for stable deterrence are therefore much more demanding, particularly for a relatively weaker and much smaller entity like Pakistan.
- South Asian domestic political structures and civil-military relationships vary considerably from the Cold War case. In the latter, security competition related primarily to the exigencies of power politics, whereas in South Asia the competition of power politics intersects with historical animosities, the demands of state-building, the precarious dynamics of power transition, and significant internal political changes in both countries.

Nuclear stability, thus, is *not* an assured outcome in South Asia. Such stability can be obtained, but it will take considerably more effort on the part of both states than is currently evident. To the degree that one or both competitors move toward vulnerable deployment patterns or suboptimal system acquisitions, as for example relatively immobile theater ballistic missiles might turn out to be, the "delicate balance of terror" that kept the peace during the Cold War might turn out to be a trifle too delicate to automatically produce the same effect in South Asia.

The third factor affecting peace-or-war outcomes in South Asia is the survival of moderate centrist parties in Indian and Pakistani domestic politics. In India, the centrist Congress Party has been battered to the point where non-Congress alternatives could govern the country well into the future. By itself, such a phenomenon is *not* problematic. But to the degree that alternative governments down the line choose to implement radical agendas internally and externally, the stage could be set for increased regional confrontation. Luckily at the moment, none of the alternative governments that can be envisaged—including the BJP—would be likely to pursue confrontational policies at home and abroad. In fact, their very ascent to power will require a significantly moderated ideological orientation, but this is an area that merits scrutiny over the long term. In Pakistan, it is unlikely that radical parties could come to power by electoral means in the near term, but their ability to coerce centrist civilian regimes into following otherwise undesirable policies cannot be underestimated. This gives rise to the troublesome possibility of diversionary efforts at domestic mobilization that could lead to self-reinforcing spirals of escalation and conflict. In order to avoid precisely such contingencies, it is important that the centrist civilian regimes now at the helm of governance succeed in providing Pakistan with both stability and prosperity—and not merely succeed in this endeavor, but actually flourish.

The fourth factor affecting the prospects of peace or war in the region is the Indian and Pakistani responses to the power transitions that may be occurring around them. Power transitions occur as a result of the uneven growth in capabilities between states. Two such transitions may be imminent in the "greater" South Asian region: a dramatic, highly visible, and perhaps unstoppable increase in Chinese power and a more muted, and perhaps more precarious, increase in Indian economic strength. These twin developments will define the future structural environment in South Asia in consequential ways. The growth in Beijing's capability, especially military power, will force India to modernize and expand its effective military capabilities as a deterrent to Chinese coercion. Such a response could threaten to alter the prevailing balance between India and Pakistan—an outcome that could also occur if India chose to expand its military power simply as an autonomous consequence of its increased economic strength. Such a development could lead to a variety of unpalatable possibilities which, though remote now, bear continual observation: increased Pakistani resistance toward India in the face of vanishing windows of opportunity; increased Indian truculence as a result of its growing strength; or increased Sino-Pakistani collusion as a consequence of converging fears about a rising India. While domestic political developments in each of these states will have a critical bearing on the outcome, the power transitions themselves—if improperly handled—could provide abundant structural incentives for continued conflict.

The fifth and final factor affecting the prospects of peace or war in the region will be Indian and Pakistani perceptions of the role of extraregional powers in any future conflict. Although extraregional powers like the United States and China will remain critical and influential actors in South Asia, the nature of their presence and the way their influence is exercised will remain important factors for stability in

South Asia. The United States, in particular, contributes to stability insofar as it can creatively use both its regional policy and its antiproliferation strategies to influence the forms of security competition in the subcontinent, the shape and evolution of Indian and Pakistani nuclear architectures, and the general patterns of political interaction between India and Pakistan. China also plays a critical role here both because of its presumed competition with India and because Beijing has evolved into a vital supplier of conventional and nuclear technologies to Pakistan.

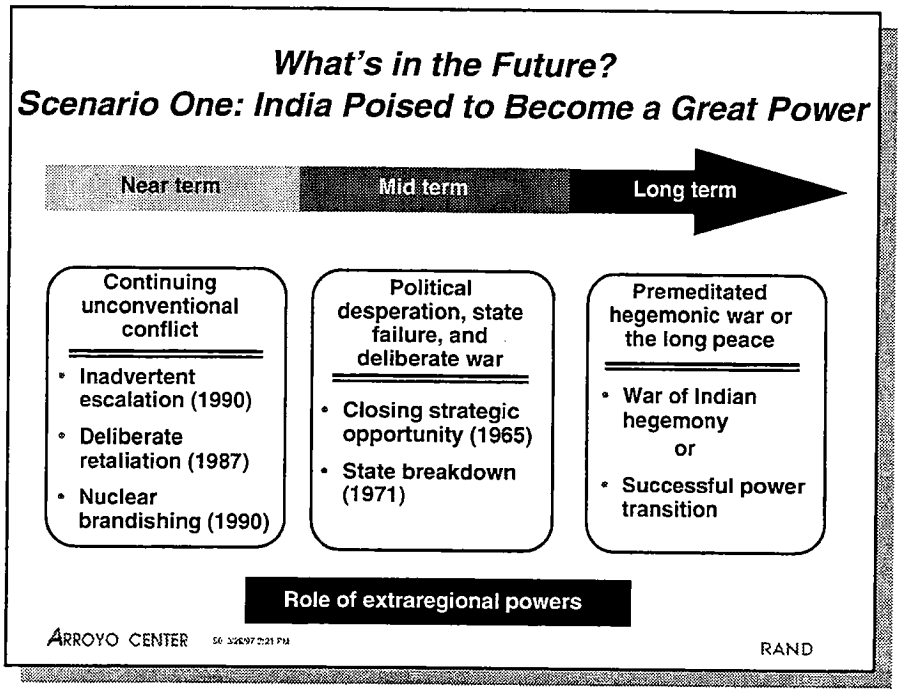
The role of both states, among some others, and *the perceptions of that role in Islamabad and New Delhi,* thus become important for stability. If Pakistan, for example, comes to view American and Chinese interest in the region as providing an opportunity to settle old scores with India—on the expectation that one or both states would rush to its assistance in the context of a major war—the stage could be set for deterrence instability in the subcontinent. A similar logic applies to India. If India, for example, comes to view its deepening relationship with the United States as an opportunity to settle old scores with Pakistan—on the expectation that the United States would not penalize India for initiating conflict because of larger geopolitical reasons relating to managing the rise of China—the stage could be set, similarly, for deterrence breakdown. Because Indian and Pakistani perceptions of the role of extraregional powers would be critical for future decisions relating to the initiation of war, it is important that all extraregional powers, especially the United States and China, pay careful attention to the nature of the political "signals" transmitted to New Delhi and Islamabad in the context of their bilateral relationships with both South Asian states. It is equally important, in this context, that all extraregional powers pay particular attention to their policies insofar as they relate to the territorial disputes under way in the subcontinent. To the degree that such policies suggest a willingness to countenance territorial revisionism through coercion or force, the stage would be set for continued discord between India and Pakistan.

Scenarios and Contingencies Involving Deterrence Breakdown in the Future

The general economic experience of the past several years has led analysts to speculate that India may be on the verge of breaking out of the low-level equilibrium trap in which it has subsisted for over thirty years. However, to gain insight about the various contingencies involving deterrence breakdown in the future, it is useful to consider alternative scenarios. Two basic scenarios, one centered on the rise of India as a regional great power and the other centered on an India that simply muddles along, will be considered. Under each scenario, the most likely contingencies involving deterrence breakdown will be identified under various time frames: the near term, which extends to about ten years; the medium term, which relates to the decade thereafter; and, the long term, which describes the secular future. In a situation where better information existed, these contingencies would be rank ordered in terms of their probability of occurrence. Because the time frames considered here are extremely long, however, probability estimates are likely to be less than useful. Consequently, a more fruitful approach has been adopted, and this consists of identifying the critical conditions which govern the possibility of any given contingency coming to pass.

The scenarios and contingencies identified in this briefing are not meant to be extensive. A more extensive discussion will be provided in the forthcoming RAND reports associated with this study. Only the contingencies that embody a potential for large-scale violence and conventional-nuclear war—in other words, outcomes that engage U.S. strategic interests in the region most directly—have been isolated here for examination. The object of identifying such contingencies is *not* to assert their inevitability or even to suggest that they might *necessarily* occur as a result of the previously identified trends. Rather, these cases are selected first because they embody events that would be really deleterious to regional stability, and second because they provide a way to identify the structural factors that must coalesce if these contingencies are to occur. As such, they serve as a useful exercise in "backward deduction."

This analytical exercise is intended primarily to provide the requisite indicators for analysts in the intelligence community tasked with tracking the problems of instability in South Asia. All contingencies in the next two slides are, therefore, aimed primarily at identifying the key political and military developments that must occur if these, the most troubling forms of deterrence instability, are to materialize. These developments are also systematically correlated with the individual contingencies in summary form in the Appendix.



Scenario One: India completes a successful power transition and assumes an important role in Asia at large.

Near term. In this scenario, unconventional wars remain the principal form of South Asian instability in the near term for all the reasons described earlier in the briefing: ineffective conventional capabilities; the lack of political compulsions for war; the absence of effective damage-limiting capabilities in the nuclear realm. Under such conditions, both states continue to support insurgencies in each other's territory while relying on their murky nuclear capabilities to prevent such provocations from mutating into full-blown challenges. This implies that, unless moderated by internal actions or external constraints, the stage is set for South Asia to continue experiencing *"ugly stability"* in the form of continued low-grade violence—a netherworld of fuzzy peace that might be episodically interrupted by bouts of inadvertent escalation (as occurred during the onset of the 1990 crisis), efforts at deliberate retaliation (embodied by Operation *Brass Tacks* in 1987), and nuclear brandishing (which also occurred in 1990).

The role of extraregional actors like the United States and China would be pretty similar to current experience: a generally benign neglect of South Asia, rhetorical exhortations for restraint directed at the regional states, and possibly intense pacifying diplomacy in the context of a crisis.

Medium term: Contingency I. Even as this miasma persists, however, under the terms of this scenario India begins to slowly acquire great-power capabilities. Instead of responding to Pakistani provocations through punitive war (a contingency that becomes more relevant in Scenario Two), it is now inclined to pursue a strategy of forbearance and continue its emphasis on economic renewal. This not only allows it the option of responding to internal grievances through strategies of co-option, but also enables it to garner the international political benefits bequeathed to "moderate" states.

As Pakistan recognizes the extent of India's economic expansion, it acquires incentives to resort to premeditated conventional war, primarily because of its desperation to secure Kashmir before the evolving power transition in South Asia closes off such opportunities permanently. This would in effect replicate the situation Pakistan faced in 1965. Moreover, if India's economic success is accompanied by increasing neglect of Pakistan and its outstanding claims by the international community (and especially by the United States), Pakistan has even greater incentives to initiate some form of "limited-aims" war to reassert the salience of its concerns.

Such a development would require a conjunction of the following factors (see the summary on page 76 of the appendix) .

- A united political decisionmaking entity emerges in Pakistan. This implies the disappearance of the current civil-military antagonism, the restoration of a military regime, or the rise of a radical regime that enjoys military support.
- Pakistan is convinced that Indian economic and military expansion is on the verge of success.
- Customary strategies—for example, support for insurgencies in India, especially those that may occur in places like Kashmir—are decreasingly successful.
- Pakistan hopes for U.S. political intervention and subsequent mediation in outstanding Indo-Pakistani disputes, and presumes effective Chinese support.
- Grave domestic weakness makes Pakistan unable to contain internal pressure from those who resent state policies or Pakistan's falling stock in the regional and international environment.

The role of extraregional actors, primarily the United States but also China, is critical in this scenario. Pakistan cannot expect to initiate such war in the face of closing strategic opportunities unless it has reason to believe that it can count on effective U.S. or Chinese intervention. Expectations of intervention here may involve hope of foreign political-military assistance but, more importantly, will center on the anticipation that foreign intervention will produce conclusive war termination and pressures on India to negotiate a final solution to outstanding disputes like Kashmir.

Medium term: Contingency II. The alternative path to premeditated conventional war in the medium term derives from the possible breakdown of the Pakistani state. For such a development to occur, however, Pakistan must be faced with the prospect of state breakdown that is attributed—fairly or unfairly—to Indian-supported or Indian-sponsored insurgencies.

It is important to note that under the general terms of this scenario—a prosperous, rising India—significant Indian support for Pakistani insurgencies would not ordinarily materialize unless a critical condition actually obtains: the presence of an aggressive or vindictive government not seen thus far in New Delhi. This is because if India's economic transformation proceeds successfully, New Delhi has diminished incentives to play "tit-for-tat," irrespective of what Islamabad does with respect to supporting insurgencies in India. In the presence of an ideologically aggressive government in New Delhi, however, India may believe that its increased economic growth provides the latitude to pursue an aggressive strategic policy independent of, or in response to, Pakistani needling. This aggressive policy of supporting dissidence in Pakistan, however, must not only be successful, it must also confront diminishing state capacity in Islamabad if deterrence breakdown is to occur. Consequently, the following factors must converge (see the summary on page 77 of the appendix).

- Internal insurgencies in Pakistan appear to be on the verge of success.
- Suspicion of Indian involvement in these insurgencies is widespread.
- Pakistan's accommodative and fiscal capacity is constrained to the point where alternative strategies of co-option and repression have little chance of success.
- The government in New Delhi is ideologically aggressive or politically vindictive.

To be sure, state breakdown in Pakistan could also occur even if India was *not* actually involved in supporting any internal dissidence in Pakistan. If so, the last condition—an aggressive government in New Delhi—is redundant. But deterrence breakdown could nonetheless occur if Islamabad chose to attribute its internal difficulties to Indian needling.

The role of extraregional powers in this case would vary based on their perception of whether India was actually involved in fomenting internal dissidence in Pakistan. If India was not involved—despite Pakistani fulmination to the contrary—both China and the United States would probably be cast in the role of hapless bystanders, though both states would probably intercede diplomatically in an effort to end the conflict, particularly if there was a threat of nuclear weapons use. If, on the other hand, Indian involvement in Pakistani state breakdown was palpable, both states would have stronger incentives to intervene, at least through coercive diplomacy, in an effort to restrain Indian aggressiveness.

Long term: Contingency I. Over the longer term, there are again two possibilities. In the first (and more remote) possibility, India may initiate a premeditated war for hegemony (see page 78 of the appendix). For this to occur, the government in New Delhi must be aggressive, and it must choose war either as a means of resolving long-standing ideological competition or simply out of political rapacity.

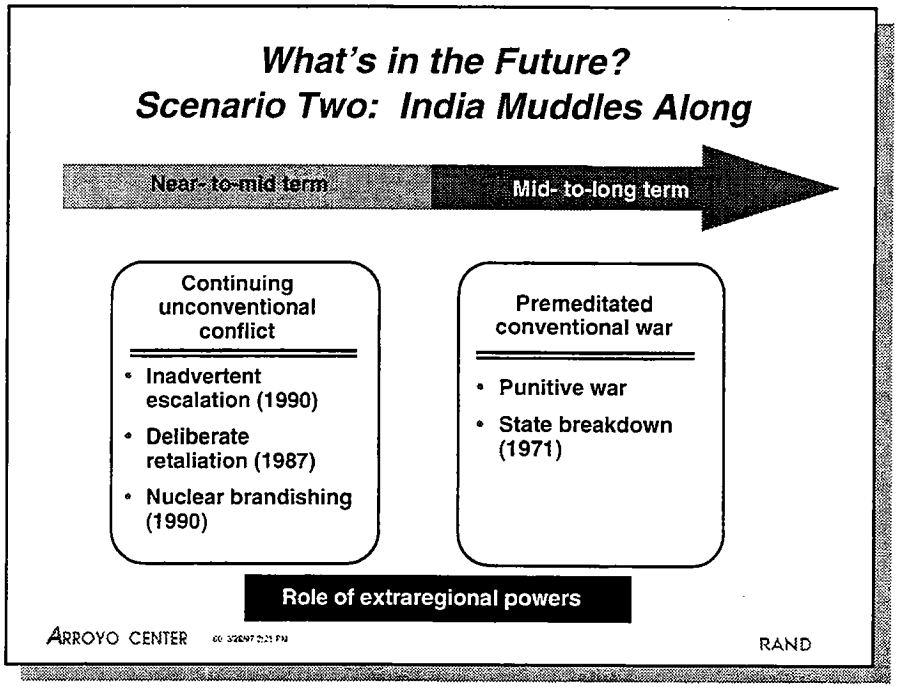
In any case, this type of hegemonic war would be driven by a conscious recognition of India's relative superiority and a willingness to use that superiority in a deliberate fashion even if Pakistani actions do not pose an immediate threat.

For such an outcome to occur, the following factors must combine:

- Indian economic transformation is complete, and India joins the ranks of the great powers in the international system.
- India acquires robust conventional capabilities that assure it rapid and decisive victory.
- India develops the means to neuter Pakistan's nuclear deterrent at acceptable cost.
- India is governed by a confident and aggressive leadership that is willing to take risks in order to achieve less-than-necessary ends.
- India can preempt the formation of international political-diplomatic coalitions that might obstruct its strategic goals.

Both the principal extraregional powers, the United States and China, would oppose any Indian attempt at hegemonic war—in the case of the latter, by military force if possible. For this reason, the already remote prospect of hegemonic war would become even less significant as a possibility.

Long term: Contingency II. In comparison to the previous case, a far more likely outcome over the secular period is the "long peace." This could occur if the power transitions in South Asia are completed peacefully. In circumstances where the Indian economy experiences meteoric growth relative to Pakistan, both states enjoy relative political stability, and both develop a set of adequate and survivable nuclear capabilities, India will have reached a position from which it could provide a modified version of the traditional "hegemonic peace." Witnessed repeatedly throughout history, such peace essentially arises when a stronger state, having no need to attack a weaker state, *chooses* not to attack it. The weaker state, being unable to attack the stronger, *cannot* disturb the peace either.



Scenario Two: India muddles along relative to Pakistan.

Near-to-mid term. In this scenario, the foreseeable future resembles the recent past. In the near-to-medium term, continuing unconventional conflicts remain the principal form of competition in South Asia because neither India nor Pakistan will have the ability to pursue other more decisive forms of combat. Both states will continue to support insurgencies in each other's territory while relying on their nuclear deterrents to prevent such provocations from mutating into full-blown challenges. This implies that, unless moderated by internal actions or external constraints, the stage is set for South Asia to experience continued low-grade violence, a netherworld of fuzzy peace that could be episodically interrupted by bouts of inadvertent escalation (as occurred during the onset of the 1990 crisis), efforts at deliberate retaliation (embodied by Operation *Brass Tacks* in 1987), and nuclear brandishing (which also occurred in 1990).

This situation is identical to the contingencies arising in the near term in Scenario One. Consequently, the role of extraregional actors like the United States and China would also be similar and reflects the current experience: a benign neglect of South Asia, rhetorical exhortations for restraint directed at the regional states, and possibly intense pacifying diplomacy in the context of a crisis.

Mid-to-long term: Contingency I. Over the medium-to-long term, however, premeditated conventional war becomes a possibility in two ways. First, it could arise if India continues to perform at a less-than-desirable rate economically and faces persistent Pakistani-supported internal insurgencies. India might then decide to undertake a punitive war against Pakistan that may or may not be limited in aims. In either case, the objective of such a war would be to inflict a high degree of punishment on Pakistan and perhaps seize the South Asian hegemony India could not achieve by peaceful means (see page 79 of the appendix). For such an outcome to occur, not only must India's economic performance become truly dismal, it must also be increasingly unable to cope with internal challenges through its customary—reactive—policies. Consequently, the following factors would have to combine in some fashion:

- Indian efforts at economic reform falter and fail to provide the takeoff necessary for a peaceful ascent to hegemony.
- Pakistani-supported internal insurgencies continue to proliferate and increase in momentum.
- Costs of combating such insurgencies through reactive means alone rise exponentially, inflicting unacceptable expense on the Indian state.
- India develops military capabilities to neuter Pakistan's nuclear deterrent at "acceptable" cost. It also garners external political understanding for such action.
- An activist government or coalition of individuals is ensconced in New Delhi.

The role of extraregional states is difficult to anticipate in this contingency and will depend mainly on their assessment of Indian war aims. So long as these aims are seen to be limited and the prospects of a nuclear exchange are judged to be relatively low, both the United States and China are likely to find themselves cast as hapless bystanders. Neither is likely to assist Pakistan if such a punitive war is perceived to be just deserts for excessive Pakistani meddling in Indian affairs. This conclusion will hold true even for China, so long as the end result of the conflict is not an Indian hegemony that can threaten Beijing. U.S. and Chinese responses to a punitive Indian war involving unlimited aims would be more antagonistic and, for that reason, such a war is less likely.

Mid-to-long term: Contingency II. The second path to premeditated war in the medium-to-long term derives from the possibility of Pakistani state breakdown, a contingency identical to that in Scenario One. For such a development to occur, insurgencies within Pakistan would have to be successful and India would have to be somehow implicated (see page 80 of the appendix). Deterrence breakdown in such circumstances requires a conjunction of the same factors identified earlier:

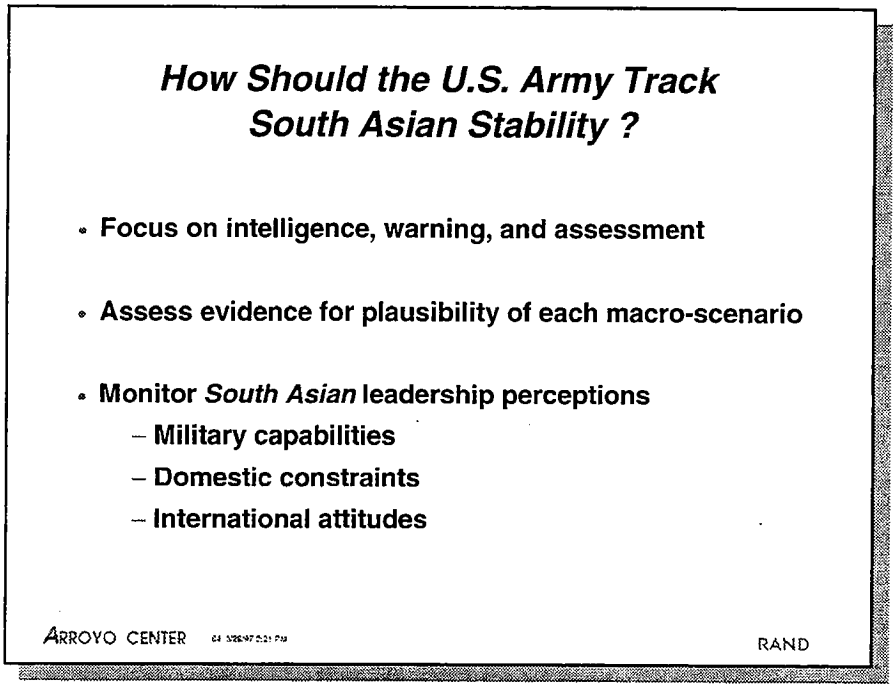
- Internal insurgency in Pakistan appears to be on the verge of success.
- Suspicion of Indian involvement in these insurgencies is widespread.
- Pakistan's accommodative, fiscal, and coercive capacity is constrained to the point where alternative strategies of co-option and internal repression have little chance of success.

All of these conditions materialized in the months leading up to the 1971 war, and they could occur again whether or not India actually supports an insurgency in Pakistan. If Islamabad were to steadily lose its capacity to control the polity, a war would be likely *if* India were viewed as either the primary or contributory cause of Pakistan's distress. And given the assumptions of this scenario—an India muddling along, perhaps coping with its own insurgencies—Indian support for insurgencies in Pakistan could possibly be expected, especially if India perceived that a successful and relatively inexpensive punitive war was beyond its reach.

The role of extraregional powers in this instance again would vary based on their perception of whether India was actually involved in fomenting internal dissidence in Pakistan. If Indian involvement was unproved, both China and the United States would probably be bystanders, though both states would probably intercede diplomatically in an effort to end the conflict, especially if there was a threat of nuclear weapons use. If, on the other hand, Indian involvement in Pakistani state breakdown was palpable, both states would have stronger incentives to intervene, at least through coercive diplomacy, in an effort to restrain Indian aggressiveness.

Outline

- Security competition in South Asia
- Relative military capabilities and constraints
- National strategies and deterrence instability
- Implications for the U.S. Army

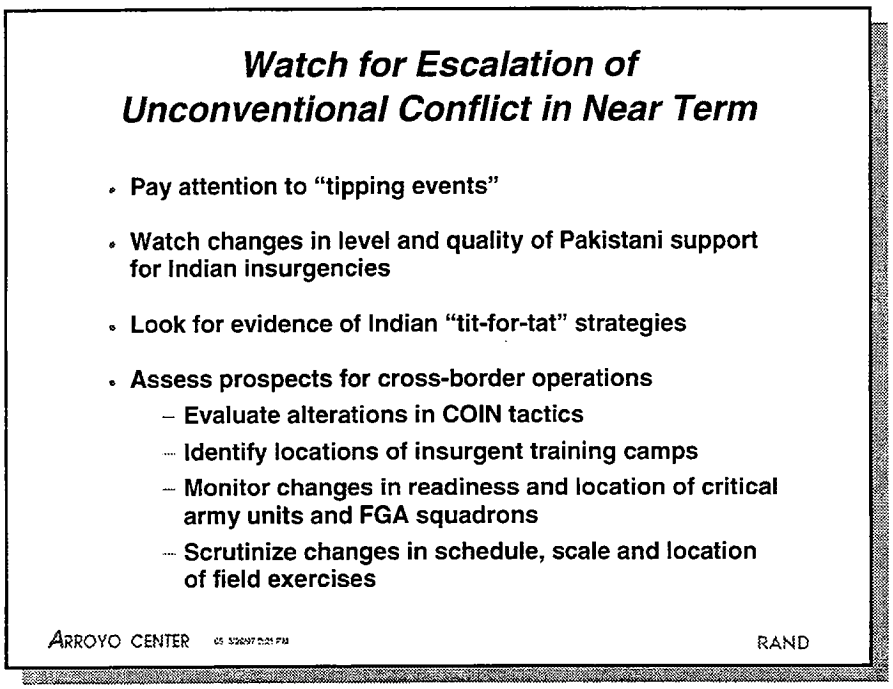


The U.S. Army plays two broad roles with respect to South Asia.

First, it provides forces and capabilities to the various CINCs for combat missions that are conducted around the world. While it is unlikely that the United States will intervene militarily in South Asia in the foreseeable future, it is certain that military-to-military interactions with the region's forces will only increase as the density of U.S. political engagement with South Asia increases over time. These interactions will also increase as American economic interests in the region increase over time—a process already under way—and if assuring regional stability becomes important for larger geopolitical reasons, like restraining a renewed Russian or an emerging Chinese hegemony that seeks to extend its influence in the region.

Second, the Army participates in the interagency assessment effort to continually provide effective intelligence, warning, and assessment of the prospects of deterrence breakdown. In this context, Army intelligence analysts and the intelligence community in general should broadly concentrate on two sets of tasks. One is to assess the broad political and economic trends that indicate whether and which of the macro-scenarios previously discussed (or their variations) may be coming to pass. This would help determine the types of conflicts that could emerge down the line.

To most usefully and accurately determine the prospects for deterrence breakdown, however, analysts must *understand the way that elites in South Asia view their capabilities and constraints (including their assessment of the prospects of foreign assistance or intervention)*. The decision calculus relating to war and peace will always be based on *those* perceptions, not our "objective" assessment of these variables.



Since both of the foregoing scenarios for South Asia's future suggest that unconventional conflicts will continue to be the primary form of security competition in the near and near-to-medium term, analysts should watch for any developments that might result in an escalation to conventional conflict. Such escalation would represent deterrence breakdown, which could open the door to all-out war, including nuclear threats and even nuclear use.

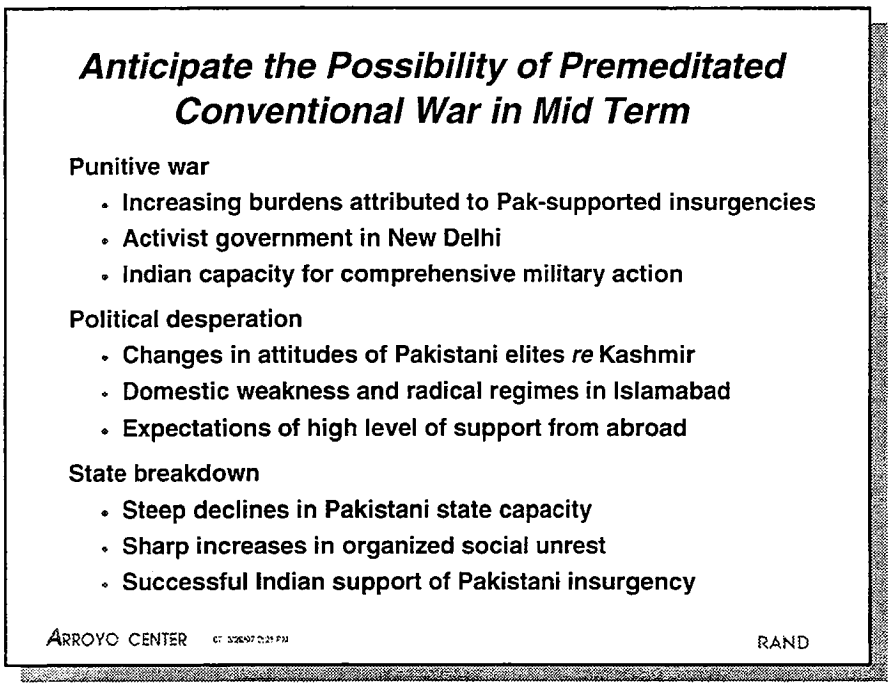
The first important signals are "tipping events," which are single, discrete episodes of conspicuous violence that galvanize public sensibilities. Tipping events usually fuel surges in domestic pressure for punitive military action aimed at either the insurgents or the competitor state. Alternatively, they can mobilize hitherto uncommitted bystanders to support the insurgency more vigorously. Tipping events can take various forms, including a large-scale public massacre, the destruction of an important public building, or any other such *conspicuous* event that mobilizes collective pressure for action. A different and more problematic kind of tipping event, which also bears monitoring, is that used by one or the other side as an excuse for launching a preplanned attack under the guise of a "spontaneous" or unplanned response.

Secondly, analysts should pay attention to changes in the levels and types of support offered by Pakistan to Indian insurgents. Sharp qualitative changes that include new kinds of technologies—e.g.., man-portable surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and anti-tank recoilless rifles—or merely significant quantitative changes—e.g., increases in the number of training camps, the number of individuals under training, the quantum of funds collected and transmitted, etc.—could presage escalated Indian counterresponses leading to possible war. Similarly, analysts should take account of the possibility and nature of Indian tit-for-tat strategies.

These could include increased assistance to disaffected Pakistanis like the MQM or the disaffected groups in Sind, an increase in the number of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) field officers in Pakistan, and even the possible establishment of insurgency training camps in India. Such developments on either side portend possible escalation.

Finally, analysts should be alert for evidence that either India or Pakistan is preparing for imminent cross-border operations. This would require watching for changes in prevailing counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics, including the use of new equipment such as helicopters, attack aircraft, etc. It would also require continuously updating the data bases that identify the location and general size of insurgent training camps, which are natural targets for cross-border operations. Monitoring changes in the readiness and location of critical army and air force units is also important because any unusual repositioning of such units could indicate likely cross-border operations. This is particularly true if specific army units like parachute and commando forces are deployed athwart insurgency training camps and other lucrative targets.

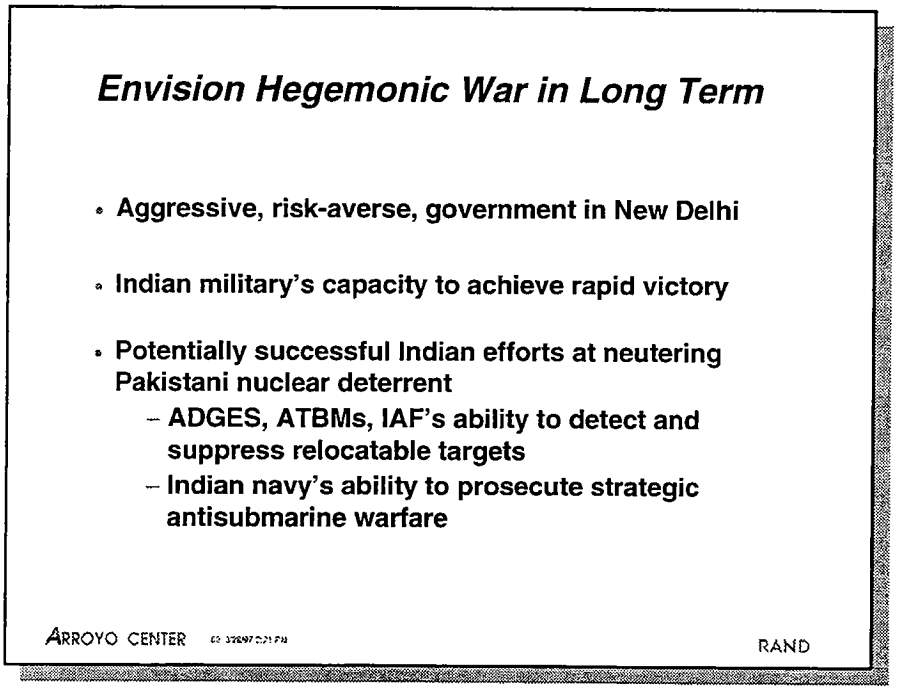
Assessing changes in the schedule, scale, composition, and location of field exercises is likewise important because exercises often conceal preparations for military action. Schedule changes that uncomfortably coincide either with observed changes in COIN tactics or with tipping events; changes in scale and composition that include larger numbers, special kinds of forces and equipment, and significant prepositioning of equipment and consumables; and changes in location, especially if they are proximate to targets of opportunity, may indicate possible cross-border military action.



Under both scenarios described earlier, premeditated conventional war is possible mainly in the mid-to-long term. Punitive war, initiated by India, becomes plausible mainly in the context of an India facing weak economic growth and highly burdensome internal insurgencies that are seen to be supported by Pakistan. Here, analysts must attend to three variables: (1) the extent of the political and fiscal burdens that are attributed by India (at both the popular and elite levels) to Pakistan's support for Indian insurgencies; (2) the degree of risk-aversion exhibited by the governing regime in New Delhi; and (3) India's assessments of its ability to neutralize Pakistan's nuclear deterrent at "acceptable" cost, to execute certain conventional military strategies cheaply and effectively, and to solicit external assistance in support of punitive action.

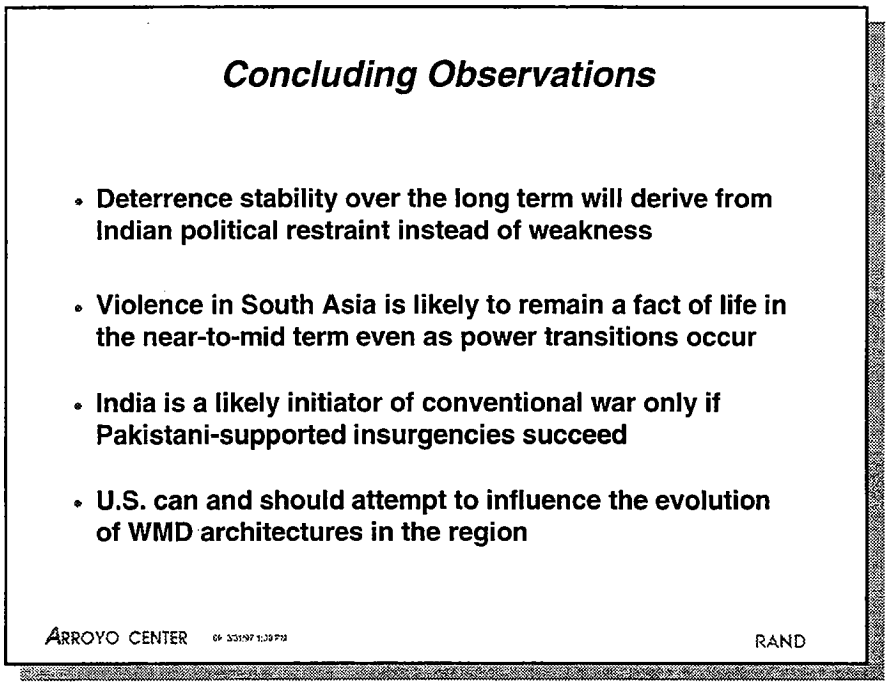
A Pakistan-initiated war resulting from political desperation would arise mainly from the perceived closing of windows of opportunity in the face of continued Indian economic growth. Again there are three variables that analysts must track: (1) the degree and nature of desperation evinced by Pakistani elites with respect to the possible disappearance of Kashmir from the international agenda; (2) the rise of radical regimes in Islamabad that enjoy military support, coupled with the existence of grave domestic weakness; and (3) the extent of the Pakistani belief that intervention-mediation by the United States, or some other country like China, could be assured as a result of war.

State breakdown leading to conflict initiated by Pakistan represents the third possibility for premeditated war in the mid-to-long term. Analysts must assess: (1) the kind of deterioration in Pakistan's accommodative, fiscal, and coercive capacity; (2) evidence of sharp increases in social unrest or successful insurgency; and (3) the emergence of a public consensus identifying India as the cause of Pakistan's problems.



The possibility of hegemonic war in the long term arises only in Scenario One, which presumes that India chooses conflict despite its (by then) assured economic success to conclusively eliminate Pakistan as a potential competitor *but not as a state.* Such a war presupposes great rapacity on the part of New Delhi.

Current assessments of India's political practices and its capacity for risk-taking suggest that the prospects for such a hegemonic war are *extremely* remote. Nevertheless, analysts would find it worthwhile to attend to several variables that might presage such an outcome in the future. They should consider whether India has an aggressive government willing to undertake risks for purely vindictive reasons. They should also determine if India's armed forces, in the estimation of its political leadership, can effectively deliver on a promise to achieve clean and decisive victory. They should monitor India's ability to neuter the Pakistani deterrent in one or more of several ways: robust air defenses, sophisticated ballistic missile defenses, and, possibly, preemptive-extended counterforce attacks. If Pakistan's nuclear deterrent is sea-based by this time, the ability of the Indian navy to conduct strategic anti-submarine warfare will also become relevant.



This briefing concludes with several general observations.

First, deterrence stability over the long term will derive not from Indian military weaknesses but from political choice. The Indian military will almost surely develop—over the secular period—the wherewithal to defeat Pakistan within the constraints of a short war. Consequently, India's strategic restraint will have to be rooted in something other than its current inability to rapidly and decisively defeat its regional competitor. The only alternative is a conscious political choice to live with Pakistan and, in particular, to adopt the view that Pakistani stability actually contributes to Indian security. Most Indian political parties, and influential sections of its elite populace, are convinced of this already. It is important, however, for American diplomacy to emphasize this theme and to carry the message to all political parties that may possibly govern India in the future. The key objective here must be to encourage Indian security managers to clearly and publicly articulate the position that a stable and prosperous Pakistan represents a strategic Indian interest and, as such, will be consciously promoted as a matter of national policy.

Second, South Asia will continue to experience some form of subconventional violence in the proximate future. This will include insurgencies and counter-insurgency operations, episodic terrorism, and sometimes even sustained cross-border exchanges of fire. While such developments should certainly be monitored carefully by the United States, their potential for escalation into conventional war should not be exaggerated. It is important to remember that both India and Pakistan *have* recognized the perils of escalation; both states also recognize that inadvertent conflicts would not serve any political interest at a time when successful premeditated wars are beyond their reach. Consequently, the potential for real instability—in the form of major conventional wars—derives not from near-term

events, but rather from longer-term possibilities. The most important such possibilities include the regional power transitions currently under way which could open fleeting windows of opportunity and vulnerability that are exploited thanks to the changing exigencies of domestic politics. This is particularly true in the context of future Indo-Chinese-Pakistani security interactions. The role of China in South Asian security, including direct Indo-Chinese rivalry and its implications for the "greater" South Asian region, therefore merits much greater attention by analysts.

Third, because India is reasonably satisfied with the status quo, it is relatively less likely than Pakistan to initiate conventional war—unless, of course, a Pakistani-supported insurgency appears to be on the verge of success. Success, in this instance, generally means an unacceptable increase in the fiscal and/or operational costs of combating insurgencies through reactive means alone, and/or an unacceptable increase in political costs in the form of sharply curtailed civil liberties and possibly spreading internal violence. If ideological moderation in India continues (as is likely), deterrence breakdown in the future would in most instances result primarily from Pakistani choices. This by no means reflects Islamabad's mendacity, but it does ensue from Pakistan's relatively higher levels of political dissatisfaction.

Fourth, the United States has a special interest in ensuring that Indian and Pakistani nuclear architectures do not evolve in generally unstable directions, especially with respect to the number, kinds, and yields of weapons developed, the types of delivery systems deployed, and the procedural systems relating to safety, doctrine, and conditions of use. In general, the nature of U.S. nonproliferation policy as it relates to the region ought to be reexamined. More specific recommendations will be advanced in forthcoming RAND reports, but for the moment it suffices to say that under no circumstances should the United States push its transparency efforts to include nuclear capabilities because at present, opacity in South Asia actually contributes to stability. The United States should also continue to maintain a high level of vigilance to ensure that both India and Pakistan refrain from developing other instruments of mass destruction like chemical and biological weapons.

Appendix

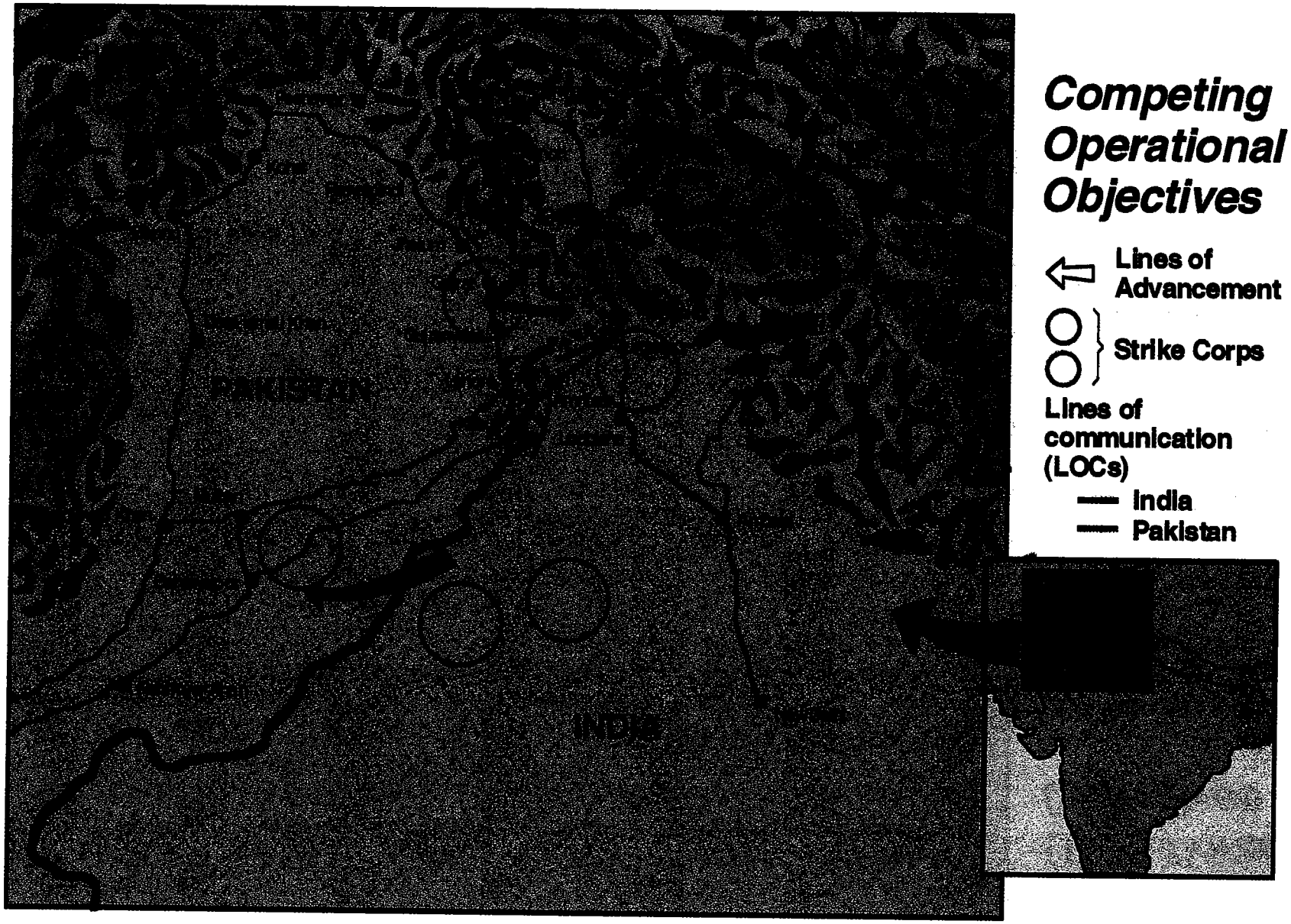


Competing Operational Objectives

- Pak-occupied Kashmir
- Shakargarh Bulge
- West Punjab
- Kashmir
- East Punjab
- 8 } Strike Corps

Lines of communication (LOCs)

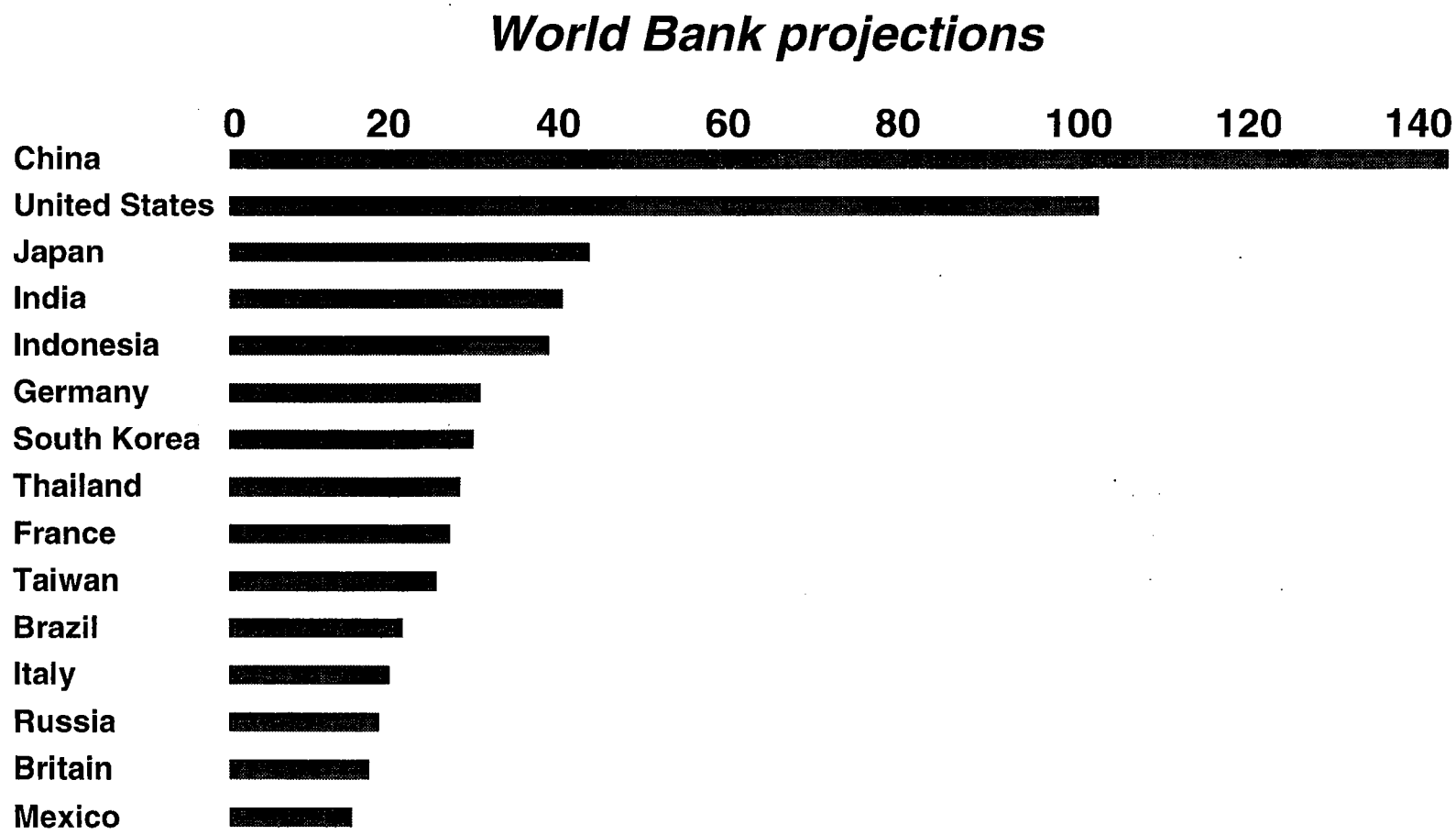
- India
- Pakistan



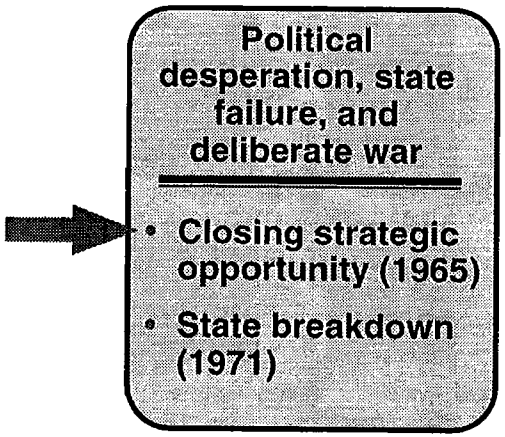
Competing Operational Objectives

- Lines of Advancement
- Strike Corps
- Lines of communication (LOCs)
  - India
  - Pakistan

Relative Size of the World's 15 Largest Economies in 2020

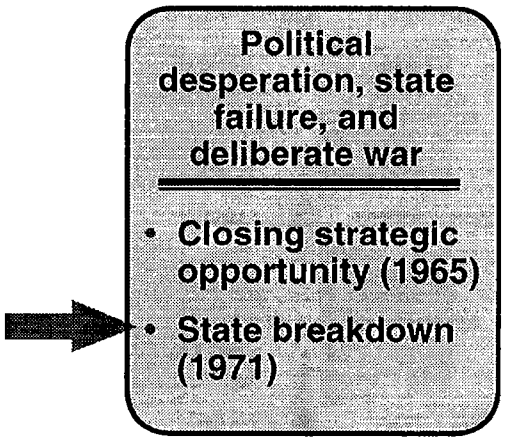


What's in the Future?
Scenario 1: India Poised to Become a Great Power



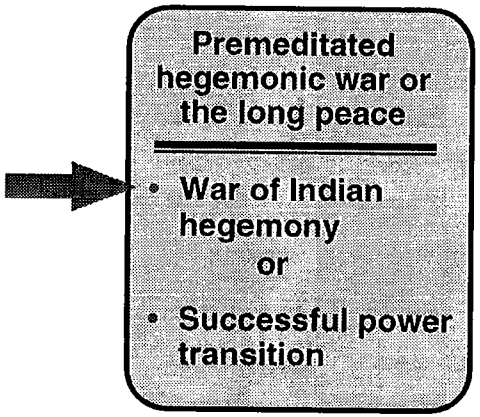
- Pakistan develops united decisionmaking mechanisms
- Pakistan is convinced that Indian economic and military expansion Is permanently successful
- Pakistani-supported insurgencies are decreasingly successful
- U.S. political intervention seems probable
- Pakistan's domestic weakness is grave

What's in the Future?
Scenario 1: India Poised to Become a Great Power



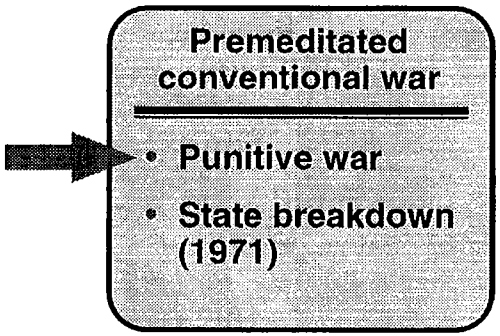
- Internal insurgencies in Pakistan appear successful
- Suspicion of Indian involvement is widespread
- Pakistan's accommodative, fiscal, and coercive capacity declines sharply
- Government in New Delhi is aggressive

What's in the Future?
Scenario 1: India Poised to Become a Great Power



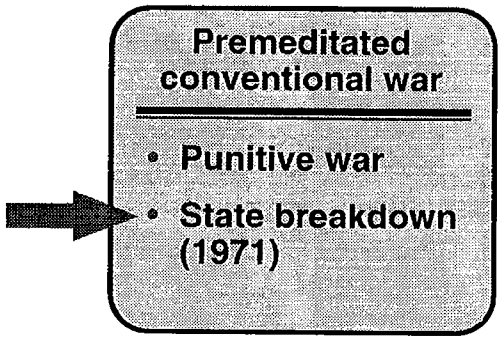
- India joins the ranks of great powers in international politics
- India acquires robust conventional capabilities for rapid and decisive victory
- India develops military capabilities to neuter Pakistan's nuclear arsenal
- India is governed by a confident and aggressive leadership
- India can preempt the formation of opposing international political-diplomatic coalitions

What's in the Future?
Scenario 2: India Muddles Along



- Indian efforts at economic reform splutter
- Pakistani-supported internal insurgencies proliferate and increase in momentum
- Costs of combating insurgencies become unacceptable to India
- India develops military capabilities to neuter Pakistan's nuclear deterrent
- India secures external support for punishing Pakistan
- Activist government or coalition is ensconced in New Delhi

What's in the Future?
Scenario 2: India Muddles Along



- **Internal insurgency in Pakistan appears successful**
- **Suspicion of Indian involvement is widespread**
- **Pakistan's accommodative, fiscal, and coercive capacity declines sharply**